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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, May 5, 2005

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, May 5, 2005

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

•(1000)
[English]

HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY

Ms. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations among all the parties and I believe that you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That this House solemnly commemorates the 60th anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi concentration and death camps and, following Canada's official participation this year in memorial events at the United Nations and at Auschwitz, the site that epitomized the evil of the Holocaust, remembers the lives of the millions of men, women and children who perished at the hands of tyranny, and honours the many Canadians who fought for freedom and justice at a time of darkness.

•(1005)

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.
(Motion agreed to)

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, you have helpfully reminded me that two weeks ago tomorrow I used the word "hypocrite" in question period. I did not clearly retract it. I would like to do so now.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for his usual cooperation in that regard.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

•(1010)
[Translation]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), I have the honour to

table, in both official languages, the government's response to five petitions.

* * *

[English]

HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I begin to speak I am reminded of the words of the cantor during the Yom Kippur service, *hineni heani mimaa*, "I am inadequate in word and in deed", for I have neither the wisdom of the scholar nor the experience of the Holocaust survivor. I only know what my parents taught me as a young boy, the profundity and pain of which I only realized years later: that there are things in Jewish history, in human history, that are too terrible to be believed but not too terrible to have happened.

Indeed, Auschwitz, Treblinka, Dachau, the horror of the Holocaust, these are beyond vocabulary. Words may ease the pain, but they can also dwarf the tragedy. The Holocaust was uniquely unique in the singularity of its genocidal intent, where biology was inexplicably and inextricably destiny, a war against the Jews where, as Elie Wiesel reminds us, not all victims were Jews, but all Jews were victims. And so we must ask ourselves on this Holocaust Memorial Day, what have we learned? What must we do?

The first lesson is the importance of *zachor*, remembrance itself, for as we remember the six million, degraded, demonized, dehumanized, murdered in the Holocaust, we have to understand that this is not a matter of abstract statistics. Unto each person there is a name. Unto each person there is an identity. Each person is a universe. As our sages tell us, whoever saves a single life, it is as if he or she saved an entire universe, but whoever kills a single person, it is as if he or she has killed an entire universe.

Lesson number two is the enduring lesson of the Holocaust, that these genocidal murderers succeeded not only because of the industry of death and the technology of terror, but because of the ideology of hate. It was this state sanctioned teaching of contempt, this demonizing of the other; this is where it all began. As our Supreme Court has affirmed, the Holocaust did not begin in the gas chambers; it began with words. These are the chilling facts of history. These are the catastrophic effects of racism.

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Lesson number three is the danger of silence, the consequences of indifference. For the genocide of European Jewry succeeded not only because of the culture of hate and the industry of death, but because of crimes of indifference, because of conspiracies of silence, and we have witnessed an appalling indifference in our own day, which took us down the road to the unthinkable, ethnic cleansing in the Balkans, and to the unspeakable, the genocide in Rwanda, made even more unspeakable because this genocide was preventable. No one can say that we did not know, but we did not act, and we have an international responsibility to act to protect the victims in the genocide by attrition in Darfur.

[*Translation*]

And so, it is our responsibility to break down these walls of indifference, to shatter these conspiracies of silence, to stand up and be counted, and not look around to see whoever else is standing before we make a judgment to do so because, in the world in which we live, there are few people prepared to stand, let alone be counted. Let there be no mistake about it: indifference in the face of evil is acquiescence with evil itself; it is complicity with evil.

[*English*]

Lesson number four is combating mass atrocity and the culture of impunity.

[*Translation*]

If the 20th century, symbolized by the Holocaust, was the age of atrocity, it was also the age of impunity. Few of the perpetrators were brought to justice; and so, just as there must be no sanctuary for hate, no refuge for bigotry, so must there be no base or sanctuary for these enemies of humankind.

[*English*]

May I close with a word to the survivors of the Holocaust, for they are the true heroes of humanity. They witnessed and endured the worst of inhumanity but somehow they found in the depths of their humanity the courage to go on and to rebuild their lives as they have built their communities. It is with them and because of them and because of the righteousness of people like Raoul Wallenberg we remember that each person has a name and an identity, and that each person is a universe.

We remember and we pray that this is not just a matter of rhetoric but must be a commitment to action, that never again will we be indifferent to racism and hate, that never again will we be silent in the face of evil, that never again will we indulge anti-Semitism old and new, that never again will we be indifferent in the face of mass atrocity and impunity. We will speak and we will act against racism, against hate, against anti-Semitism, against atrocity and against injustice. This is part of the larger struggle for human rights and human dignity in our time.

May this day be not only an act of remembrance, which it is, but let it be a remembrance to act, which it must be, because in these times *qui s'excuse s'accuse*. Whoever remains indifferent indicts himself or herself.

• (1015)

Mr. Peter MacKay (Central Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin with thanks to the Minister of Justice for his profound

words and comments on the horror of the Holocaust and the lessons that mankind must learn from such atrocities.

I want to join with him and all members of the House in embracing his passion and commitment to end hatred, racism and all forms of intolerance.

Today is Holocaust Memorial Day, Yom Hashoah, a day which remembers that six million Jews were murdered simply because they were Jewish. Yom Hashoah occurs on the 27th of Nissan, the Jewish calendar, and this year it occurs as we remember the liberation of Europe. The end of this horrible chapter in world history coincided.

Today, however, we remember the horror of the Holocaust, the concentration camps where Jewish families were decimated, parents lost to children, children lost to parents. Today we remember the pain the survivors of the Holocaust live with every day and we salute their courage to go on and their determination to ensure that we never forget the atrocities that happened to them.

This triumph over tragedy is simply the very best of human spirit and a shining example to all.

[*Translation*]

We must not forget that these atrocities were the fruits of the hate and racism condoned by nations.

[*English*]

As a society, we must put aside indifference to racism. We must put aside any hint or hesitation of confrontation, of prejudice and hatred. We must continue to disavow anti-Semitism and we must speak out loudly and clearly that these attitudes are simply unacceptable. As a country, we must be ready to stand up in the global community and condemn actions that are unacceptable.

Today, Canadians and the world remember the horror of the Holocaust. We must recommit to never forgetting these atrocities so that these atrocities can never again be committed.

We must offer our prayers to those who have perished and we must offer our compassion and support to those who survived yet live with these memories.

It is only by teaching our children to abhor the attitudes that enabled the Holocaust to occur that we can ensure that this is never repeated. "Never again" must be as real to us and those who follow as it is to those brave survivors of this darkest period of world history.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Marceau (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is a great honour to rise in this place today. I would, however, rather have been at Auschwitz with the Minister of Justice and our wives along with the 20,000 other people who are participating today in the March of the Living in that death camp in Auschwitz, Poland.

Yom Hashoah is being officially and solemnly commemorated for the second time this year. The chosen date, the 26th day of Nissan on the Jewish calendar, is in remembrance of the Warsaw ghetto uprising that saw weak, famished and poorly armed Jews stand up to the powerful Wehrmacht, the German army.

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On November 7, 2003, with a unanimous vote of this House, Parliament passed Bill C-459, establishing Holocaust Memorial Day.

I had made that suggestion after my friend lost his father, Albert Rudolph, who was a survivor of this tragedy. Because there are fewer and fewer of these survivors and heroes still alive, it is incumbent upon public authorities and parliamentarians to take over, so that the horror of what happened is not forgotten. Despite all the studies, books, documentaries and seminars, it is not always easy to properly understand, explain and talk about the Shoah because it is unspeakable.

It is unspeakable in part because, paradoxically, it has both unique and universal aspects.

I use the term universal, because, before the Shoah, and unfortunately also afterward, people all over the world have been the victims of degradation, humiliation, torture and murder because of their ethnic background. The list of these is unfortunately too long. We think immediately of Rwanda, for course, where 800,000 people were murdered with machetes within the space of six weeks. Then there is the former Yugoslavia. The situation in Sudan at the present time, where the Janjaweed are massacring the black Sudanese at will, is another example. How shameful that, after the example of the Shoah, the international community has not put an end to these massacres. Unfortunately, it is obvious that the lessons of the Holocaust have not all been learned.

The other unique aspect of the Shoah is that anti-Semitism is still far too evident today. Some consider this to be the most long-lasting hatred of all. There has been a resurgence of anti-Semitism in the world, according to a recently released study by the University of Tel Aviv. Over the past 15 years anti-Semitic acts have been on the rise in the world.

Its effects are felt in Canada and in Quebec as well. Here are some examples: May 19, 2001, a bomb in a Quebec City synagogue; summer 2004, synagogues and houses vandalized in Toronto; April 5, 2004, United Talmud Torah School set fire to; Chief David Ahenakew's extremely anti-Semitic remarks. Only a week ago, students of Royal St. George's College in Toronto lauded an openly anti-Semitic and pro-Nazi website.

If our youth are still doing such things, it is because we have been remiss as a society. As parliamentarians, we have not done our part to counteract racism, intolerance and anti-Semitism.

This Holocaust Memorial Day imposes two duties on us: first of all, to remember, so that history does not repeat itself; second, to react every time there is a racist remark or a racist act, to stand up and speak out against such things, and to put an end to this behaviour. These duties are imposed upon us by the six million innocent victims. They are a sacred trust.

• (1020)

[English]

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am deeply honoured to join with colleagues in the House from all parties to speak of the horrors of the Holocaust and to remember this most tragic chapter in the history of the world.

I am honoured to rise today to speak on behalf of all of my colleagues in the New Democratic Party of Canada and our leader to remember the victims and survivors of the Holocaust.

[Translation]

Today is a day to remember and to take time away from our busy lives to commemorate the mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, sons and daughters of those who lost their life during the darkest hours in the entire history of humanity.

• (1025)

[English]

Just 60 years ago, within living memory, our world was ravaged by an evil and hatred never before imagined by humanity. Entire families were destroyed. Six million were murdered. Those who survived have spent a lifetime carrying the enormous burden of humankind's most despicable deeds.

[Translation]

Today is vital for all of us who were spared the cruelty of war and the atrocities of the Holocaust. We must remember and honour the victims and the survivors who have to live with this tragedy.

[English]

This is a day for reflection and, as my colleague, the Minister of Justice said, to remember, and the act of remembrance is vital to ensuring that history does not repeat itself. It is a time to consider the journey we have taken since the Holocaust and the road that is before us.

Today we live in a world where intolerance still exists, where human rights are not guaranteed and where genocide goes unopposed. We live in a society right now where racially motivated hate crimes are on the increase and where there has been a dramatic rise in anti-Semitic incidents.

We must not forget the lessons of history. We cannot grow complacent, comforted by the passing of time or the security of distance. Inaction in the face of tyranny is an injustice itself, not bound to history books alone. As has been said so often, the omission of good is just as reprehensible as the commission of evil.

It is our obligation to Holocaust victims, survivors and indeed to all of humanity that we never again permit the destructive forces of prejudice and hatred to cast their dark shadow. It is within all of us to stand firm, to strive harder, to aspire to create a world where the best of the human spirit prevails and the evil veil of intolerance is forever eradicated.

As one survivor, Baruch Cohen, has written:

As we commemorate those who were murdered, we also tell their story. We, the few survivors, with our painful, unhealed scars, must continue to reveal our private memories, not for the sake of history only, but for the sake of present and future generations.

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Let me end on a personal note to acknowledge the work done by the House a little over a year ago, for which I am very proud, to create the national Holocaust Memorial Day, something that has been very important for the entire country and all our citizens to acknowledge that systemic violence, racism and hatred continue to occur. It has become for us a moment to reflect, remember and rededicate our lives.

I am proud today that we are able to celebrate the second annual Holocaust Memorial Day.

Finally, let me say that I had the privilege of being part of the 55th liberation of Holland ceremonies and had an opportunity to visit Camp Westerbork, which was the transition camp for many on their way to Auschwitz and other death camps.

I will end with the words of Rabbi Levison, who said at that ceremony:

It has been said before, one hundred and two thousand people from this camp were sent to their death. Now, one hundred and two thousand people doesn't mean a thing. It has once been said that one accidental death is a tragedy, twenty accidental deaths is a disaster, one hundred and two thousand is a statistical point. Therefore, I pray you never say one hundred and two thousand people have died. Always think one hundred and two thousand times, one person died. That is the message of peace.

Zakhor, we remember. *Shalom*.

* * *

● (1030)

[*Translation*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

JUSTICE, HUMAN RIGHTS, PUBLIC SAFETY AND EMERGENCY
PREPAREDNESS

Hon. Paul DeVillers (Simcoe North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the eighth report of the Standing Committee on Justice, Human Rights, Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

[*English*]

The committee draws to the attention of the House that the committee agreed to undertake a study of child pornography, the role of the Internet, the responsibility of Internet service providers, and the impact of any new technology in this phenomenon.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mr. John Williams (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I move that the second report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts presented on Thursday, October 28, 2004, be concurred in.

I will be dividing my time with the member for Prince George—Peace River.

Last February 10, 2004 a political storm burst over Canada and the dark clouds continue to spread out even today. Last year we heard from the Auditor General how \$100 million had been spent with little or no value. Jean Chrétien, as the Prime Minister of the day, presided over a corrupt program that became the largest political scandal in our history.

Yes, we have had scandals before. We think back to the railway debates under our first Prime Minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, and

the pipeline debates in the 1950s, but both of these occurred as we were building our great country of Canada. The railways were to unite our land from sea to sea and the pipeline was to bring wealth and prosperity to the west. However, this corruption scandal has the capacity to bring an end to our great country, the Canadian dream, and the nation that is admired by people all around the world.

This scandal has fueled the separatists in the province of Quebec. The scandal has infuriated the people of Quebec and they have soured on the federal government that has manipulated and ignored its own rules on referenda, funneled taxpayers' money illegally into its own pockets to fight elections, and the litany goes on and on.

Prime Minister Jean Chrétien said this program was all about saving Canada, yet the minister of intergovernmental affairs at the time has said that a few advertising sponsorships around the country would not change anybody's opinion. The Prime Minister of the day, Mr. Chrétien, said, "So there are a few million dollars wasted, lost or stolen. What was the big deal? This was going to save the country". Now we know it may be the catalyst that breaks the country.

This is a scandal, not that we have lost \$100 million, which in itself is horrendous, but the fact that it may be the catalyst that brings this great country to an end. That is the corruption scandal of this country; the greatest scandal that we have ever had.

Last year the public accounts committee was charged by the current Prime Minister to investigate this issue. We think of the litany of witnesses who appeared before the committee and how they tried to save their own skins by blaming other people. We had Chuck Guité, a middle level bureaucrat, telling us how he could run into the minister's office at a whim. He could run to the chief of staff of the Prime Minister whenever he wanted to see the chief of staff. He was the conduit for what appears to be a conspiracy at the top that has potentially brought this country to its knees.

We know that the chief of staff to the former Prime Minister has been involved because he admitted that to the public accounts committee and to the Gomery commission. When he has been involved, we know that the former Prime Minister is involved because they were the best of friends going back many years. They shared all their information and the chief of staff would never have worked without the concurrence of the former Prime Minister.

We know that Alfonso Gagliano was involved. He admitted that at the public accounts committee and at the Gomery inquiry, where he should never have been talking to middle level bureaucrats, but he was, in giving them direction as to where the money would go

We had André Ouellet, the former minister of foreign affairs and long time member of this House who ended up running Canada Post, involved in illegal contracts being funnelled through advertising agencies. The money went to Canada Post under his direction and then who knows where it all went from there. We know that André Ouellet was filling his pockets with expense accounts without a single receipt and collected \$2 million to \$3 million without a single receipt, claiming reimbursement. This is the calibre and the character of the people who were running the sponsorship scandal.

We cannot forget Jean Carle, the Business Development Bank vice-president, also a very good friend of Jean Chrétien, who admitted at the Gomery inquiry that what he was doing was money laundering with taxpayers' money.

• (1035)

The Prime Minister appears to be involved. He has denied his involvement, but nonetheless, he appears to be involved because all his friends were involved, so why would he not be involved? Jean Pelletier, chief of staff, Andre Ouellet, Jean Carle, Alfonso Gagliano, these people were friends. They also had the levers of this country in their hands.

They had a guy by the name of Chuck Guité, who was at the Gomery inquiry yesterday, spilling all the information that he was handing out. Chuck Guité could move among these people at will because he was getting their direction: spend the money here; give the money there; illegal contract over there; bags of cash somewhere else; spread it around. But, while it was spreading around, it was all going in one direction. It was going to the advertising agencies who were all friends and all getting rich with taxpayers' money. However, they had their directions too because they were giving the bags of cash back to the Liberal Party.

Can we tolerate that today? This is the worst scandal that we have had in this country. I cannot believe that we are sitting here tolerating a scandal and the government is saying not to worry, that it will look after it. Something must be done. Therefore, the House and the public accounts committee will do whatever it can to ensure that this never ever happens again.

Hon. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened with interest to what the member had to say. I just came from my constituency a few moments ago, as a matter of fact, where I had a meeting with the chamber of commerce of one of the communities, namely the town of Alfred, or more properly put, Alfred et Plantagenet.

[*Translation*]

They are two towns in my riding. I spoke with the people there and everyone asked me why the members of Parliament wanted to have an election. I answered that this was not at all what was wanted, although there was a certain party in this House that was keen on it because a few weeks ago it saw what seemed to be a favourable poll, although that has disappeared in the meantime.

Is it not true that the Conservatives have painted themselves into a corner—that they are stuck now because of the position they took a little while ago? Now we have this rather sad situation. We know that Canadians do not want an election. Some Conservative members are not even around; they have gone away to hide so that they will not have to vote like the rest of them. The members in question could hardly deny it. I could even name them.

The hon. member is still insisting on saying what he just told us, with all these exaggerations. Does the hon. member not know that Canadians want to see us get down to work, pass the budget, ask questions in the House about agriculture, and talk about economic development?

Three lobbies were active around Parliament this week, including one group of firefighters from all across the country. Not one

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opposition member questioned the ministers about what was going to be done to improve the lives of these people, in response to their complaints. The steelworkers were also here, a few days ago, to ask some important questions. It is the opposition members' duty to question the government on these matters. Well, they are not doing it at all any more. They have stopped doing their work as parliamentarians.

Why do the hon. members across the aisle refuse to do what they promised the people in their ridings? They keep on desperately because they are caught in the corner into which they painted themselves a few days ago, claiming to want an election, while they themselves know that some of their colleagues, in their party, do not want one any more. Is it not time to put an end to this charade and get back to work?

Yesterday, I was not even able to ask a question about agriculture in my riding because the Conservative members across the aisle were doing nothing but causing an uproar. The Conservatives did not want to hear people in this House talking about milk quotas. That is the reality.

I'm tired of it, as Canadians are. Why does the member not stop it so that we can get back to work, because that is what people want?

• (1040)

[*English*]

Mr. John Williams: Madam Speaker, trust a Liberal member to focus on anything but the corruption scandal and involvement of the Liberal Party. He is talking about elections. He is talking about budgets. He is talking about agriculture. He is talking about anything other than the sponsorship scandal and the fact that the House has a responsibility to hold the government accountable. When the government is not accountable, it gets away with a hundred million dollars of taxpayer money and perhaps even more.

This is why we exist here. We are here to hold the government up by the neck and give it a shake and say, "You can't do that, there is a penalty for doing that and you'll be held accountable for doing that". For the member to suggest otherwise is an affront to the House.

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Madam Speaker, before I begin my remarks today, I would like to take a moment to recognize and pay special tribute to three of my colleagues: two from the official opposition and a former Ottawa roommate of mine who now sits as an independent member. Despite all three of these fine gentleman courageously battling cancer, all three continue to honour their families, friends and constituents by placing service to their country ahead of themselves.

To my friends, the members for Okanagan—Shuswap, Westlock—St. Paul and Surrey North, is say through you, Madam Speaker, have not only earned my deepest respect and admiration but that of all Canadians.

I am pleased to address this motion today and I have an amendment to offer the House. While I will be moving it at the end of my speech, I will give the House a little heads up.

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The amendment will recommit the report. It will ask the committee to reference chapters 3, 4 and 5 of the November 2003 report of the Auditor General which has brought to the attention of the Canadian public that there appears to be widespread and systemic corruption at the highest levels of the Liberal government, spanning many years and revealed at the Gomery commission. It will instruct the committee to recommend that the government immediately resign because the House has already concluded that it does not have the confidence in the government over the matter of Liberal corruption.

The reasons stated in the amendment are valid. I am of the opinion that the majority of members of the House believe they are true, and I would like to put that to the test.

Clearly there is doubt whether or not the government enjoys the support of the House. It has been talked about many times over the last few weeks. It is unconscionable for it to continue to spend billions of taxpayer dollars and commit billions more without the support of the House.

As the House is well aware, the government has taken supply days away from the opposition parties. It has begun debating committee reports in a procedural bid to scuttle any attempt to have a vote on a particular report that would reinstate an opposition day for May 19.

This attempt by the government to delay a confidence vote is bordering on being unconstitutional, I submit. The House can no longer continue to support the business of the government. The reason is that I do not think the government has the confidence of the House.

Canadians are owed an opportunity to pass judgment on whether the Liberal Party remains fit for public office. If the Liberal Party is corrupt, as the sworn evidence shows, it should be removed. It is not good enough for Liberals to tell Canadians that since none of them have actually been convicted of any crimes they are still fit to govern. Canadians have higher standards than that.

Since the Prime Minister's televised plea for more time, the Liberal government has announced almost \$7.5 billion in additional spending, including the \$4.6 billion it used to secure 19 NDP votes in the House.

The Prime Minister and the NDP are emptying the public treasury. If we allow the Prime Minister to have his way, this would just be the beginning of 10 month orgy of spending. Canadians cannot afford a 10 month election campaign on their dime. I submit they cannot afford another 10 days of this government, let alone 10 more months.

Before I move the amendment, I would like to address a point of order that the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons made to the last amendment that was moved by the Leader of the Opposition to a concurrence motion. The minister had trouble with some of the wording. He did not like that the amendment instructed the committee. He suggested that the wording should have said, "that the committee has the power to amend".

Then the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell referenced the McGrath reforms and tried to associate those changes with the reasons why the amendment should be ruled out of order. It was the McGrath reforms themselves that supported the receivability of the

motion, not the other way around as the former House leader tried to make us believe.

Committees prior to the McGrath reforms received their terms of reference from the House, so it was necessary to use the words "have the power". After the McGrath reforms, committees had the power to make independent recommendations, so it is no longer necessary to use those words. Committees are so independent, thanks to McGrath, that they can even recommend that the government resign.

I have reviewed a number of amendments that were moved in previous parliaments and their wording supports the amendment my leader moved on April 22 and they support the wording of the amendment that I will now move.

● (1045)

I move:

That the motion before us be amended by deleting all the words after the word "That" and substituting the following:

The second report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, presented on October 28, 2004, be not now concurred in, but that it be recommitted to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts with instruction that it amend the same so as to recommend, in reference to Chapters 3, 4 and 5 of the November 2003 Report of the Auditor General, which has brought to the attention of the Canadian public that there appears to be wide spread and systemic corruption at the highest levels of the Liberal government, spanning many years, and revealed at the Gomery Commission, that the government immediately resign because the Canadian public has already concluded that it does not have confidence in the government over this matter.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. On behalf of the government I would like to question whether or not this amendment is in order. This is instructions to a committee of the House based essentially on political commentary and on conclusions that have not been reached, even though the House leader of the official opposition maintains that those conclusions have been reached.

To the contrary, Canadians have indicated, quite overwhelmingly, that they do not share these conclusions. They have indicated that they wish to see the work of the Gomery commission concluded and reported on before being asked to pass judgment on that. Canadians have indicated that they want to see the fact finding of Judge Gomery concluded.

To draw conclusions and instruct a committee based on these non-existent conclusions is not in order. We would challenge the validity of the amendment of the hon. member in instructing a committee based essentially on political commentary and on conclusions that have certainly not been reached by the House.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, we would invite you to rule that the amendment is not in order.

● (1050)

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, I believe the amendment in itself affirms what the previous speaker just said. The word "appears" was used in the amendment and that "the Canadian public has decided" was another reference.

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees our rights under natural law and justice to due process, to the rule of law and innocent until proven guilty. The amendment in itself actually would constitute a violation of the charter itself in terms of the spirit of the charter to protect our right to due process.

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Mr. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, I did have some references to Journals that I was going to read in my remarks and decided not to, but they might be appropriate for your decision at this point in time.

The House leader of the government referred to the McGraw report during his earlier submission to you, Mr. Speaker, to rule a similar amendment out of order. I reviewed a number of amendments that were moved in previous Parliaments and I believe their wording supports the amendment my leader moved on April 22 and the one that I have just moved, which is being called into question.

I refer you, Mr. Speaker, to the Journals of December 5, 1997. The member for North Vancouver moved:

That the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the "That" and substituting the following:

"the 13th Report be not now concurred in, but that it be recommitted to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs with instruction that they amend the same so as to recommend that all Private Members' Business be votable and appropriate measures be taken to ensure that an increased amount of time is available in the House for such Business".

Also from Journals of December 15, 1999, two years later, the member for Medicine Hat moved:

That the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word "That" and substituting the following:

"the First Report of the Standing Committee on Finance, presented on Friday, December 10, 1999, be not now concurred in, but that it be recommitted to the Standing Committee on Finance with instruction that they amend the same, so as to recommend that the government re-index the income tax system to inflation by immediately eliminating bracket creep".

On June 20, 1996 the member for Lethbridge moved:

That the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word "That" and substituting the following:

"the 22nd Report be not now concurred in but that it be recommitted to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs with instruction that they amend the same so as to recommend that..."

The amendment went on at some point from there.

It is our contention, and we certainly seek the advice of the Chair, that the wording of not only the amendment that I just moved but the one that my leader moved a couple of Fridays ago, which has been called into question, are very much in order. The Speaker who ruled at that time that the amendment was in order was making the proper ruling.

The Speaker: The Chair appreciates the submissions of the hon. members who have participated in this matter: the deputy government House leader, the member for Mississauga South and the opposition House leader.

I will take the comments under advisement and come back to the House in due course. In the meantime, debate may proceed on this matter.

• (1055)

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. member for Prince George—Peace River a question. Previous to the member speaking, the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell stood up to say that he had been back in his riding and the only people who are really pushing for an election now or who want an election are those in the Conservative Party.

However, I noticed something in the two national newspapers today. The *National Post* has an editorial entitled "Time to put this House out of its misery". The article goes on to some extent about how it is time that this Parliament came to an end. Of course the *Globe and Mail* also has one, entitled "Why prolong this paralyzing agony?", which states:

—an election that cleared the air, one way or another, would at least unfreeze the locked cogs of the public service, and get the legislative process flowing again.

I have also noticed lately that the polls of Canadian citizens are becoming more balanced. Most people now realize that we are in a mess. Parliament is at a standstill. Committees are at a standstill. Ministers' offices are at a standstill. We here in Ottawa really are no longer effective. There is more and more support for an election soon.

Would the hon. House leader comment on this? Does he think there is more support now for an election as people understand the incredible revelations that come out day after day in the Gomery commission about their tax dollars and how those dollars have been wasted? The cost of an election is often quoted at \$230 million. The Liberals recently paid \$240 million for each NDP vote in order to survive for 10 months. I ask the hon. opposition House leader to comment on that.

Mr. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comment, since it was raised already in debate. I suspect that if this debate does proceed, which I hope it does, I am sure that it will not be the last time we will hear the same type of comment that we just heard from the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell.

It is this sense that somehow, because Canadians are asked whether they want an election and some of them say they do not, that is reason not to have one. I would submit that there is probably quite a long list of very good reasons to have an election now, but I can think of at least three right off the top of my head.

The first one deals with the scandal my colleague referred to. When a government is mired in scandal to this extent, I submit that not only does it not have any more credibility with the Canadian people, it does not have any credibility internationally. Important international issues, the trade issues that are the bread and butter of many of our constituents, whether it is the softwood lumber dispute or the beef ban at the border, are sitting on ministers' desks gathering dust because the ministers are so embroiled in trying to protect their own political hides. They are totally focused on—

An hon. member: Damage control.

Mr. Jay Hill: Damage control, that is right. That is what I was looking for. They are so focused on damage control that they cannot do their jobs as ministers.

Likewise, the second point I would make is the one that I made during my remarks about the treasury. This government is emptying the public treasury. Its members are flying across the country in Challenger jets, making announcements every day. What do we see? Billions and billions of dollars are being just blown out the window as they fly over at 30,000 feet. Are we going to allow this to continue? I do not think Canadians want that to continue, that wanton spending that is just blowing their tax dollars, not only for this year but for years to come.

Routine Proceedings

My colleague referred to the last reason I would reference and it is that this place has become dysfunctional. Even the Prime Minister himself, on national television when he held his address to the nation, said this place was dysfunctional. It was not an opposition member who said that. It was not the leader of the Bloc Québécois or the leader of the official opposition who said that. The Prime Minister said it is dysfunctional, yet the Liberals want to keep it going. They want to keep this dysfunctional place going not for another day or a week or a month, but for 10 more months.

We believe that Canadians deserve better. We know they deserve to have a government with integrity, a government they can trust, a government that is not mired in scandal. They deserve a government that will spend their dollars wisely and account for each and every tax dollar, not shrug its shoulders and say, "If a few million dollars went missing, it is no big deal, it is all for the greater good". The greater good, that is what the Liberals argue somehow, because it was spent on this so-called national unity program that has resulted in more disunity in this country than we have ever seen before, and it all happened under a Liberal watch with Liberal misspending.

● (1100)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Deputy Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Minister responsible for Official Languages, Minister responsible for Democratic Reform and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the opposition leader's contention is wrong. Hon. members must not forget just who established the Gomery commission, which is sitting at the moment.

I am a member of cabinet, and the first decision cabinet made on the morning of Saturday, December 13, the day after the swearing in, was to cancel the sponsorship program. Then, within minutes of the tabling of the Auditor General's report—on February 10, if I am not mistaken—the Prime Minister announced the government's intention to act on the report and establish a commission of inquiry. That was done, and it is now sitting.

From the discussions many of us in this House have had with voters and according to many polls and editorials, it is clear that the public wants to await the commission's findings before an election is called. The Prime Minister has in fact promised to call a general election within 30 days of the tabling of the Gomery commission's final report.

We have a situation here where the opposition is trying to bring the government down at any cost on the basis of unproven allegations not yet verified by Justice Gomery. I think the common sense of Canadians should prevail here. They want to know what happened, as we all do. However, in addition to launching this inquiry, the government has initiated an astounding number of reforms to ensure that nothing like this ever happens again.

For example, anything to do with the governance of crown corporations is in the process of being revised. Some revisions are already complete including the way we appoint members to boards of directors. Other changes are currently underway and will soon be concluded.

We have reinstated the comptroller general position, now part of the Treasury Board, as essentially a deputy minister who will be responsible for assigning in each Government of Canada agency and department a representative who will ensure that every expense is authorized by this comptroller general. This position existed in the past, but the previous government eliminated it.

If we made any mistake, it was in not reinstating this position sooner. However, we have done so now and we will certainly see the benefits.

Other measures have been mentioned in the House on various occasions. For example, we have initiated legal proceedings to recover the money. A series of police investigations have resulted in charges being laid. Another series of police investigations is underway. All that to say that initiatives have been taken to get to the bottom of things, to find out what happened and to make sure it never happens again.

Nonetheless, Canadians have an incredible sense of fair-play. They know there is a process to be followed and that we cannot simply declare people guilty. If, at the end of a legitimate process, the allegations lead to charges, then people will be charged. However, we cannot charge people on allegations alone. That is not how justice works in this country.

What the opposition is proposing, in other words, to draw conclusions and declare people guilty without due process, should raise some concern in every Canadian.

The other point is that the government is being accused of spending as if there were no tomorrow. That is not the case. In 1997, after a collective effort on the part of Canadians, we succeeded in eliminating our budget deficit. We had been accumulating deficits for at least 30 years. That was happening at such a pace that we had accumulated a debt in excess of \$600 billion, which was putting us in an almost impossible situation.

Through our efforts, we managed to curb and eliminate the deficit. If I am not mistaken, that was in 1997. Since then, we have succeeded in accumulating some surpluses and in reducing our debt by \$60 billion. This means that, each year, we save between \$3 billion and \$4 billion in interests on the debt. Still, our debt continues to be around \$500 billion, which is a lot of amount of money.

● (1105)

It must be realized that this government has absolutely no intention of going back to a deficit situation. Even after the agreement that we reached with the New Democratic Party, which will soon be presented to the House in the form of a bill accompanying the budget, we want to stick to this basic position. It is absolutely clear that we should not go back to a deficit situation.

Routine Proceedings

All this to say that the debate that the opposition just started with this amendment to the motion to adopt a report does not reflect the reality. If the amendment proposed by the leader of the official opposition in the House is deemed in order, I will have to propose a subamendment, because that would be essential. Therefore, Madam Speaker, if, based on your good judgment, the amendment is deemed in order, I will propose the following subamendment:

[English]

That the amendment be amended by deleting all of the words commencing with the phrase "with instruction".

[Translation]

Still on this issue, the scenario presented by the official opposition—

[English]

Mr. Jay Hill: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. My hon. colleague moved his subamendment. Normally that takes place at the end of his remarks. That is the first thing.

Second, I would ask for a ruling on whether it is in order for him to move a subamendment when he is disputing the validity of the amendment itself that he wants to further amend. I would seek advice on that from the Chair. I know he is perfectly within his rights to move a subamendment but if he is going to do so, he should acknowledge that the amendment is in order if he wants to further amend it.

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): The amendment is under advisement. The subamendment can therefore be under advisement.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound.

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague, the member for Prince George—Peace River, for bringing forth this motion.

I have been sitting here in humour listening to the hon. member from across the way, the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, implying, like a lot that has been coming from the other side of the House, that the only reason a possible election is even being talked about is because of the results of what might come out of the Gomery inquiry. It is almost implying, almost comically, with everything that has been happening in this House in the short months that I have been here, one would think that everyone over there was wearing a halo. I am referring to our opposition days, our respective motions passed by democratic votes in the House and those types of things.

Those halos, if there were any, were certainly knocked off and trampled into the carpet by the former Liberal member from Mississauga—Erindale when she was trampling George Bush's doll into the carpet. I find that kind of humorous. The Gomery inquiry is not the only reason to call an election. There are many other reasons.

I would like the hon. member to speak on behalf of his government and tell us when the government will start respecting things in the House and bring back opposition days and those kinds of things. This House needs to be treated with the respect that it deserves.

● (1110)

[Translation]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Madam Speaker, the government is showing tremendous respect for the House of Commons and for Parliament. The latter can express itself in a number of ways, and a chosen option may have an impact that is not the same as that of another option. When Parliament decides, as the legislator, to exercise its exclusive power to legislate, and when this House and the other place support a bill that then receives royal assent, the government has no choice but to act on the will of the legislator. That is what respect for the exclusive powers of Parliament as legislator is all about.

A government would never question this principle unless, of course, there is a judicial interpretation issue involved, which can happen. There are three branches, namely the judicial, legislative and executive branches. Each one has certain powers and responsibilities. It is in the coordinating of these powers, particularly in the House, where the legislative and the executive are together on a daily basis, that there can be some minor variations. However, the executive branch fully respects the legislative when it fulfills its duties in that capacity, when it acts as an agency monitoring the government, or when it issues notices to the executive branch.

First, there is absolutely no lack of respect toward the legislator, Parliament, on the part of the government. Second, the government, this party, has no fear of letting voters pass judgment. However, we do respect voters, and they have made it clear that if they have to pass judgment on a situation, they want to do it in full knowledge, based on the facts that will be presented to them in the final report of the Gomery commission. In fact, the member opposite is one of those who recognized that.

This is why the Prime Minister made a commitment, on behalf of the government, to call a general election in the 30 days following the release of the final report of the Gomery commission. In so doing, the government showed that it has absolutely no fear of going into an election. The government is respectful of the voters' desire to know the facts before passing judgment.

[English]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, during the debate earlier, questions were raised about fiscal responsibility. Canadians well know and the House well knows that when the government took office back in 1993 we had a \$42 billion deficit. Since that time there has been an extraordinary change, a recovery, and in fact an enviable record of fiscal management which is the pride of the world.

I wonder if the member would care to comment on the successes of the government.

Routine Proceedings

[Translation]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Madam Speaker, I would be pleased to. I must point out, however, that recognition of the marked improvement in the fiscal situation of this country comes for the most part from third parties. Since 1997, we have ceased to record annual deficits and accumulate debt. We have turned the situation around by reducing the debt. We are saving \$3 billion to \$4 billion annually on debt service charges. Now, in fact, for the first time in some years, we have some hitherto unavailable leeway and are therefore able to address some other problems.

For example, last September we concluded an agreement enabling us to increase the health transfers to the provinces by some \$41 billion over the next 10 years. Had we not been able to create that financial wiggle room, we would never have been able to have such an agreement with all provinces and all territories, without exception.

The budget we presented follows suit; once again it forecasts a surplus. We have been able to earmark \$5 billion for early childhood education and child care. We have even managed to conclude two agreements in principle, one with Manitoba and the other with Saskatchewan. In the near future we hope to be able to conclude agreements with other provinces as well.

Having created this financial leeway, we can now allocate resources to services important to Canadians, such as housing, early childhood education, help for our communities, our towns and cities, and national defence. The budget before the House proposes a major increase—in fact, the biggest in 20 years—in national defence budgets.

The same goes for seniors, particularly those receiving the guaranteed income supplement, who are having trouble making ends meet. We propose to increase the guaranteed income supplement by 7%, on top of indexation.

These are all manifestations of a desire to help Canadians from sea to sea by meeting their needs. To that end, the public finances had to be put in order, and we have done that.

●(1115)

[English]

Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Madam Speaker, I find it quite interesting listening to the member comment on what is happening at Gomery and the allegations and the charges that have been brought forward and sworn testimony.

Recent events in the world in the business community have seen many charges and allegations against the leadership of Enron. I am wondering if the member would be prepared to comment on whether the people who ran Enron, the presidents and all the managers, should have been allowed to continue to manage the company under all those charges, under all those allegations, under all those suspicions that were created in the public.

Would the member agree that this government is asking to do exactly the same thing?

[Translation]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: Madam Speaker, absolutely not because charges are not laid against the government. Charges are laid by the RCMP against individuals in private companies.

What we have at present is a commission of inquiry that has been charged with the task of shedding light on allegations that are at times contradictory. Our colleague opposite spoke of allegations made yesterday by Mr. Guité, the same person who made statements, also under oath, at the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. There are two series of statements made under oath by the same person, one before the Gomery inquiry and the other before the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, and they contradict each other. Which version are we to believe?

That is where Canadians realize that we absolutely must allow the inquiry the time to complete its work and draw its conclusions. That is why we asked the commissioner to engage in this process and get the facts, so that Canadians can make a judgment in full knowledge of the facts.

I understand that our colleagues opposite are worried about this. They are afraid Justice Gomery's possible findings might foil their attempt to ruin the reputations of everyone on this side of the House.

Canadians have a true thirst for justice. They want the process to be respected. In this country people are presumed innocent until proven guilty. Finding people guilty based on unfounded and contradictory allegations—as we saw again today—goes against what Canadians stand for.

●(1120)

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Repentigny, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak to the motion introduced today by our friends in the Conservative Party.

First of all, the Bloc Québécois is going to support this very commendable Conservative initiative. As our leader has repeatedly said, I think that our arguments are well-known now, solid and very justifiable in the sense that this government no longer has the moral authority to continue to administer public property, most of all, and the affairs of state. For this reason, my colleagues in the Bloc Québécois and I are going to support the motion introduced today by the Conservative Party.

The purpose of this motion is to ask the government to withdraw from these functions, which are supposed to be honourable, and give the people a chance to say now—at a time of year when people are doing their spring cleaning in several ways, including on the political level—that we must be sure that clean people are doing honest work. The money our fellow citizens have provided, especially just recently through their income tax returns, must also be handled a little more honestly. The money provided by these people must flow back to them in the form of quality services. Canadians and Quebecers have a right to expect quality services.

Routine Proceedings

When I heard the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell shouting himself hoarse a little while ago, I remembered his oratorical flights back in the days when he was in the rat pack along with Sheila Copps, John Nunziata, Brian Tobin and others who have left now. I remember when the member was scathing toward Mr. Mulroney's Conservative government. If the situation were reversed, I wonder what kind of scene they would be making, like the ones we saw back in the days of the Conservative government, when the famous rat pack was in opposition.

I heard the deputy leader of the government, the former chair of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, tell us that Canadians want to wait for the Gomery commission to finish its work. However, if we were in question period, I would ask him why, on May 3, 2004, on the eve of the calling of the federal election, his current Prime Minister said and I quote, "People know enough about the sponsorship scandal; we need to have an election".

If the Liberals knew enough on May 3, 2004, why do they know less now after hearing all the witnesses who have appeared before the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and the Gomery commission?

If enough was known on May 3, 2004, it was about how this mess, which we knew about last year, came to be. All we are finding out now really is the who, because we already knew, in large part, about the how. We are hearing about who did what to create this mess.

Some \$250 million is involved. Like everyone watching us today, I read the papers. An international firm, Kroll, not to mention any names, is currently following the money, tracking where every dollar went. It wants to find out how the person in charge of signing the cheques at the time, namely the finance minister, could sign \$250 million worth of cheques over a few years to make his friends happy. How was this money paid out by the federal government, the Department of Finance, through some large cracks in Treasury Board, thereby flouting the system and government regulations governing advertising contracts and sponsorships? The cracks must have been very large at the time. Perhaps, as the Prime Minister said in his address to the nation, the then President of the Treasury Board will also tell us he was not vigilant enough. No one in that government was vigilant enough, if they let such a mess happen.

The Liberals are saying, "Let us stay in office, we who have grabbed \$100 million out of the \$250 million. Let us stay in office, and we will be able to fix this".

• (1125)

They are not wrong there, in part. Let us take the example of a bank manager who steals \$10 million from his employer and asks to be allowed to stay on the job because he knows how to prevent someone else from stealing that amount. Of course, he stole the money and knows how he did it. He knows what needs to be corrected so that no one can steal \$10 million again from the bank. I wonder whether his employer will say, "You are right. You stole \$10 million, and I am so proud you want to fix up the system that I will keep you on. I will even give you a bonus and a raise. Indeed, I will appoint you the ambassador to Denmark".

There is absolutely no doubt they can rectify the problem, because they created it, they abused the system. However, this is not what Canadians and voters want. They want the people who made the grave mistakes to be punished and more trustworthy individuals to take over from them and clean it all up.

It is not up to the person who starts a fire to put it out. It is not the person who stole who will be asked to rectify the system. There is a bit of a paradox here. It is true, they know the system. They set it up, created it and abused it.

What's more, they tell us a parallel group was involved and they were not part of it. In connection with the parallel group and this government's morality, I am going to mention a few names. If the captain, the coach or the leader of a group of people acting dishonestly is changed, only one person is changed, but the rest of the team remains as corrupt as it was under another leader.

So let us look at the group that is now in power, and see whether they have sufficient moral fibre to continue. The member for Outremont, the Prime Minister's lieutenant, gives us information, does not give it, gives us a little bit, implies or conceals information as to whether he was or was not a lobbyist, did or did not have social meetings, as to whether his meals with Jean Lafleur and some of the people involved in the sponsorship scandal—where they feasted on foie gras and filet mignon washed down with champagne, sauternes and fine wines—were just a quick lunch.

I do not if other members of this House have quick lunches like that, so well organized and with such a high-priced menu and wine list.

When he organized meetings with his friends and with ex-minister Gagliano, these were social get-togethers. When he is asked whether he was paid by contract or on retainer for a set period, he does not dare answer. So here we have players on today's team trying to cast doubt on former team members when they certainly appear not to be as pure as the driven snow, themselves.

We are told that people do not know enough for there to be an election, and that we need to wait until the Gomery inquiry is over. How can it be that the Prime Minister knew enough to recall Alfonso Gagliano from his ambassador's post in Denmark? According to the Liberals, he did not have the right to be presumed innocent. He was recalled before the inquiry was over. If those were nothing but allegations, will there be a public apology? Will Mr. Gagliano get his job in Denmark back? Will they make amends? Can the Liberals stand up and tell us that they will indeed give him back all his lost wages, give him back his position, and make an apology because it looks as if he was recalled based on false allegations?

Allegations serious enough to recall an ambassador are not something one sees every day, you will agree. The allegations are serious enough to get two CEOs of crown agencies dismissed. Now for a flight of political fancy. What if, when the Gomery inquiry was over, the conclusion was that these were nothing but allegations? Would those two get apologies because they were let go in error? Enough was known when they were let go, but today not enough was known to admit to people "this is the mess we have made".

Routine Proceedings

•(1130)

The current Minister of the Environment and member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville was minister responsible for the Privy Council at the time when money was being hidden in the Canadian Unity Fund. Today, he is still part of the same team. He is now the Minister of the Environment and sponsor of the referendum clarity bill. And on that topic, we learned at the Gomery inquiry that once again taxpayer dollars were freely used to shove an unspeakably anti-democratic bill down the throats of Quebeckers. I think the public should know that.

We could make an analogy between the clarity bill, Bill C-20, and a game of hockey. Bill C-20 has two main components, it strives for a clear result and a clear question. What is a clear result? They say it will be determined after the referendum. That would be like two hockey teams facing off and the game ending with a score of 4 to 1 for the white team only to have the blue team tell them that, unfortunately, they needed 6 goals to win. The 4 to 1 result would not be enough for them to win the game. How many points do you need to win a hockey game? Under Bill C-20 the number of points needed for a win would be confirmed once the game is over.

Insofar as a clear question is concerned, my leader has already joked that, as long we have been talking about it, there could be two boxes: “Are you for yes?” and “Are you for no?” It would be clear for people. They speak about a clear question, but who is supposed to decide whether the question is clear? They say that everyone and no one should. The Senate, for example, could say that it did not find the question clear. Prince Edward Island could do the same. Maybe Bill C-20 could have been amended to say that the opinion of the Pope and the American president should be sought in order to know whether the question is clear. That is roughly what the Liberal Party was proposing in introducing Bill C-20.

In view of the fact that the clear question was not so clear for Quebeckers and the result that was wanted after the game was over was not clear either, they needed some good ways of selling the idea. So the Minister of the Environment dipped into the Canadian Unity Fund and tried to sell the idea to Quebeckers, telling them that this bill made some sense.

One of the former heads of the Canadian Unity Council was named an ambassador as well. I do not know where he is now, but he was appointed Canadian ambassador to China, in Beijing, immediately after these events. His name is Howard Balloch.

I had the privilege of meeting him. Because he was very far away, he was much more loquacious than some ministers are and some witnesses heard by the Gomery Commission. He told me that he had certain disagreements with former minister Tobin, “Captain Canada”, about organizing the famous “love-in” in Montreal to tell us how much we were loved. If he has returned to Canadian shores and is listening to us today, I will gladly recall his words of 1997-98 for him. There are words one never forgets. He told me, rather boastfully, that the separatists would never find the \$18 million that had been hidden in the Canadian Unity Fund. He said that the job had been done so well that the money would never be found. Maybe he too could be recalled to Canada, if he is still the Canadian ambassador somewhere. It is a suggestion of mine, unless my allegations are not as serious as in Mr. Gagliano's case.

Unfortunately for him, his confidence is looking rather unfounded. I think that we will find where the \$18 million was hidden, just as we are learning where the \$100 million from the sponsorship scandal went.

•(1135)

Jean Pelletier was on this team as well. They wanted us to believe that there was a parallel scandal woven by a parallel group. So, when the Prime Minister's chief of staff is involved in a scandal, is it still reasonable to speak of a parallel group, as the Prime Minister's Quebec lieutenant continues to do?

This morning, Serge Gosselin testified before the Gomery commission. He too has been a chief of staff. John Welch will also be called. He is the former chief of staff of a current minister. I learned something very interesting recently: Claire Brouillet, the partner or former partner of Daniel Dezainde, will be testifying before the Gomery commission.

What I find interesting in this is that she was my Liberal opponent in 1993 in my riding. After that, questionable things were happening in the Liberal Party. It took 12 years to finally prove these things and get the people involved to testify before the Gomery commission. I am very curious to hear what she has to say. I am sure she too knows some interesting things.

I introduced a motion in the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, which was supported by the majority. Oddly, the Liberals, who want to know everything, opposed it. The aim of the motion was to have a better understanding of chapter 5 of the Auditor General's November 2003 report.

According to the motion presented by the Conservatives, once witnesses have been heard in the public accounts committee on chapters 3, 4 and 5, a confidence vote is to be held. It is useful to recall that this committee has in fact studied chapters 3 and 4, but set chapter 5 aside on the assumption that Justice Gomery would study it. To everyone's surprise, we learned that the Gomery commission was looking at chapters 3 and 4 only. So the committee wanted to examine chapter 5, since the aim is to discover the truth. However, the Liberals opposed it.

What is so special about chapter 5? It contains a little paragraph, hardly anything at all, paragraph 5.17, if I recall correctly, which provides that, within the Department of Finance and certain other departments, problems were encountered in the awarding of public opinion and research contracts. There is no mention of advertising or polls. Chapters 3 and 4, however, concern the Department of Public Works and Government Services, the Treasury Board Secretariat and the PMO. Chapter 5 involves the office of the Minister of Finance. Who held that portfolio at the time? The current Prime Minister.

Why did he exclude chapter 5 from the mandate of the Gomery commission? Was it a coincidence? Perhaps the answer is buried in the question itself. Why did the Liberals refuse to let the Standing Committee on Public Accounts review this chapter? Indeed, the answer may be buried in the question itself. What was it in this chapter that had to do with this government's morals?

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The Prime Minister, who was then the Minister of Finance, stubbornly refused to get involved in the Prime Minister's game, not because he was so pure, but because he had to please his friends, including Earncliffe, which is a firm located in Ottawa. Who was working for Earncliffe? There was David Herle, the spouse of his chief of staff, with whom they bought some land. The chief of staff threatened the Department of Public Works and Government Services into giving contracts to Earncliffe without complying with Treasury Board rules or government standards.

Why did the Liberals deliberately omit the review of chapter 5 by the Gomery commission, and why did they refuse to do so in committee, even though the majority would have allowed such an exercise?

• (1140)

It is because there was another little scandal. We are not talking about a parallel group involved in the same scandal, we are talking about a parallel scandal involving the current Prime Minister when he was the Minister of Finance.

These are, in essence, the reasons why we support the motion by the Conservative Party.

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Prentice (Calgary Centre-North, CPC): Madam Speaker, the question that must be asked is, does the government have the confidence of the House? It is a question that I would ask my friend who has just spoken.

The purpose of the matter that is before the House is the widespread and systematic corruption at the highest level of the Liberal government spanning many years as revealed in the Gomery commission. I can say categorically from my perspective as a western Canadian that this is a government that does not enjoy the confidence of Canadians. It does not have the moral authority to govern the country and something should be done about it.

We have witnessed in the last several days the perverse spectacle of a government dipping, ducking and dodging, introducing filibusters to filibuster its own legislation. This is unheard of in Canadian parliamentary history. As near as I can tell it is unheard of in parliamentary history anywhere. All of this perverse and disgusting use of the rules is to avoid having a confidence motion in the House. That is what the government is up to.

I ask my friend if the situation is the same in his part of the country. Does the government have the moral authority to govern Canada? I say that it does not. It should face the House of Commons and establish that it has the confidence of the House.

I will quote from Marleau and Montpetit as I finish my comments. It states:

The whole law of finance, and consequently the whole British constitution, is grounded upon one fundamental principle, laid down at the very outset of English parliamentary history and secured by three hundred years of mingled conflict with the Crown and peaceful growth. All taxes and public burdens imposed upon the nation for purposes of state, whatsoever their nature, must be granted by the representatives of the citizens and taxpayers, i.e., by Parliament.

This government does not have the confidence of the House or the moral authority to govern the country. That is the question I would ask of my friend.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau: Madam Speaker, I can see the member for Ottawa—Vanier nodding his head. He seems to agree with everything the Conservative member just said. Does he not? He disagrees somewhat.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger: That is science fiction.

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau: My apologies. I had misheard.

I appreciate the question that was put to me by the Conservative member. He is from the west. He asked how this sponsorship scandal was perceived in Quebec. I will be pleased to answer that question.

This is a very damaging scandal. Crime or serious wrongdoing often cause more far reaching collateral damage than one might think. If we could have a dialogue, I would put the question back to the hon. member from the west or suggest to him that, in Ontario, in the prairies, in the west and just about everywhere outside Quebec, the perception is that this is a Quebec scandal, when in fact it is a Liberal one. It is important to point that out.

Unfortunately, the image that the Liberals have projected in Quebec, and the image of Quebec they have projected across Canada, is that Quebeckers are corrupt people, when those responsible for the sponsorship scandal are in fact the Quebec Liberals. It is important to point that out.

We are told that politicians are corrupt. While politicians caused the scandal and politicians used the scandal, it was politicians also who revealed it. This is therefore a most relevant question. It is very important to point out that the sponsorship scandal happened in Quebec because, unfortunately, efforts were made to buy the conscience of Quebeckers. This is, however, a Liberal scandal that happened in Quebec, because of the actions of Liberal politicians who are mostly from Quebec.

So, the perception in Quebec is that this is the group of individuals who are responsible for the sponsorship scandal. That is also the perception that should be shared throughout Canada. This was a game that was played not by the people of Quebec, not by the public relation firms in Quebec but by certain firms. Sadly for those firms which are honest—because there are still many honest ones in Quebec—and did not get involved in this scandal, they will be penalized when contracts are awarded in the rest of Canada, because people will say that, if it comes from Quebec, it must be dirty and dishonest.

It is a Liberal scandal that occurred in Quebec because of Liberal politicians. I will say it again and I want the Canadian public to know that this is how it happened and that the people of Quebec are not dishonest.

• (1145)

[*English*]

Hon. Keith Martin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the profound tragedy of this motion is that it is a rabid political exercise designed for nothing more than for the opposition to gain power. We understand that is the rule and the name of the game with respect to being in opposition. We know that.

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The bigger tragedy for most Canadians out there watching is the fact that there are people without jobs. There are people without houses. There are people without health care.

The government has implemented solutions to bring health care to Canadians. We want to put people back to work. The government has to keep our fiscal house in order. We want to bring housing to those who do not have houses. We must ensure that those who are least privileged in our society will have the privileges that they require. The government wants to put money in the ground for critical infrastructure for the municipalities. All this and more is what the government is trying to do.

Unfortunately, the opposition is simply trying to engage in this political exercise that is moving this House away from the real job that Canadians have sent us here to do, which is to deal with their problems.

I want to talk to the issue at hand and the motion. The measure of a government is the way in which it deals with the problem it is confronted with. Does the government ignore it? Does it hide it, or does it deal with the problem in a very pragmatic way? Without a shadow of a doubt, the public knows that the government has dealt with the problem it is faced with.

How has the government done that? The government has done it through the Gomery inquiry. It has done it through the comptroller system that has been introduced to ensure that every ministry will have another oversight mechanism. This will ensure that all public moneys are used in a rational, responsible, transparent and effective way.

My question for the member has two parts. Does the member believe that a person is innocent until proven guilty? If he believes that a person is innocent until proven guilty, would he subvert the Gomery inquiry and end it in the middle of its work before Justice Gomery has had a chance to tell Canadians the truth?

If the member believes in innocent until proven guilty and if he is trying to subvert the Gomery inquiry, which is what he is trying to do right now, then he is a hypocrite.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau: Madam Speaker, why was Alfonso Gagliano recalled? In fact, he was recalled before the end of the Gomery inquiry. Was he not entitled to be presumed innocent, under the Liberal theory?

The hon. member is saying that we want to overturn the government in order to come into power. I would say that is absolutely not the intention of the Bloc Québécois. I can give him my word on that.

The hon. member also said that the public is more concerned about housing, health and agriculture. If all that money had not been wasted on Jean Brault, Gilles-André Gosselin, and Chuck Guité, and spent on the public instead, then maybe the public would be happier and we would now be in the process of governing and doing other things.

In closing, the Liberals keep saying, "We set up the Gomery inquiry". That makes me think of a movie I saw in which the person responsible for the crime was then hired to solve problems later. I

think the Liberals saw it too, loved it and are fixated on this movie starring Leonardo DiCaprio called *Catch Me If You Can*. After the crook robbed all the banks, he was then hired to monitor what was going on in the banks.

Nonetheless, what happens in Hollywood must not happen in Canada.

• (1150)

[*English*]

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to join in the debate. However, it is unfortunate though that we are dealing more with the crass partisan politics of this place than with the business that matters to the people of Canada. Right now the business of the people of Canada is to get this improved budget through the House, as a result of the efforts of the NDP. This is an improved and better budget that makes life better for Canadians in areas that matter to them.

The budget we now have and the fact that Jack Layton has intervened gives us a budget that we can support. This budget now takes some serious steps forward in protecting the environment and—

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): The member is an experienced parliamentarian and knows that the names of members cannot be used in the House. Please use their riding name or their title.

Mr. David Christopherson: I apologize, Madam Speaker.

The leader of the New Democratic Party made these improvements because it was part of our mandate. Again I am emphasizing that the new improved budget as a result of the intervention by the leader of the New Democratic Party will give us fair environmental protection. It will do something positive about student debt. It will make sure that real money is invested in providing affordable housing for Canadians who desperately need it. It will flow more money now as a result of the new NDP improved budget. It will flow even more money to municipalities like my hometown of Hamilton that desperately need federal assistance.

Part of what I ran on and part of why I came here was to ensure that cities like Hamilton got the federal money they are entitled to and which they desperately need. What are we faced with? We are faced with an attempt by the official opposition, joined by another of the opposition parties, the Bloc, to bring down this Parliament. Nothing else seems to matter. It would take down a budget that helps Canadians, that makes life better for Canadian families. Not just that, crass partisan politics are taking hold right now.

I stand to be corrected, and in the 10 minutes for questions and comments, I invite the official opposition to correct me if I am wrong, but my understanding is that the official opposition was the only party that refused to allow this House to adjourn on Monday so that more members of the House could be in Europe to represent the veterans of Canada who went to war and died. That is wrong. That is not the business of the people. That is the partisan interests of the Conservative Party.

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What we ought to be doing right now is putting our veterans first and foremost, ahead of what is important to this place. Eyes around the world are rivetted on what is going on in Europe. Some of us want to be there to represent the citizens in our community who died fighting for this country.

Members of the opposition are saying that we can go. They would like that. They would love all the members to leave so they could sneak through a non-confidence motion. What a shame. I have been in politics long enough to know that if any other party did something that prevented elected members of the House of Commons from attending ceremonies in Europe to pay tribute to and honour those who fought and died for this country, those members would be the first ones hanging from the rooftops saying that what was being done was wrong. Now it is the members of the official opposition who ought to hang their heads in shame. Shame on the official opposition for doing that.

We have made an agreement. The leader of the New Democratic Party and this caucus gave their word that we would do everything possible to give life to this budget for the reasons I have already mentioned. No one should worry. The people will get a chance to pass judgment on the Liberals vis-à-vis the disgusting scandal that is now embracing this place. They will get their chance to do that.

When I talk to my constituents in Hamilton Centre they want this place to do something. We have been here for 10 months. Members of the official opposition are drooling at the prospect of an election. Why? Do they think the government should no longer be in power? No, that is just a fig leaf. The real reason is the Conservatives' poll numbers bounced up and all of a sudden they cannot help themselves. More than anything, the official opposition wants to move from that side of the House to this side of the House. Fair enough, but not at the expense of a budget that is going to make life better for Canadians, because we are here to make this work.

Madam Speaker, I am asking for permission to split my time with the member for Kitchener Centre.

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): Agreed.

• (1155)

Mr. David Christopherson: Madam Speaker, members should make no mistake. As I did in committee, I did not support a non-confidence motion for the very reasons I have outlined, because we want this Parliament to work long enough to at least get the better budget through and make life better for Canadians. Is that not why we are here? Here we have an opportunity to do it.

Do not give me any guff about backroom deals. What are minority governments all about? Why do Canadians like minority governments? Because it denies the likes of those two parties from having absolute majorities to do whatever they want. In a minority people have to sit down and negotiate. We did that. The leader of the New Democratic Party met with the Prime Minister. We improved the budget to the point where I am getting calls, and I would bet a lot of other members are too, from constituents saying that whatever kind of fight there may be with the other parties, do not jeopardize the new, improved budget because it is helping communities and families. Canadians want the money to pass and then we can fight like hell all we want, but they want us to get some work done first.

That is why we did not support the non-confidence motion at the public accounts committee and we will not be supporting non-confidence. We will do everything we can to prevent that motion from coming forward until we get the budget through which would make life better for Canadians. That is why I came to this place.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, Canadians will know that the speech by the member was the first one to have substance to it. It was about the business of Parliament. It was not about the political interests of a particular party or the separatist interests of another party. The member talked about the business of this place and the reality of a minority Parliament. He talked about cooperation, the needs of Canadians, some of the issues that will translate directly into helping Canadians.

What do the Conservatives and Bloc want? They want to get rid of the government as soon as possible. They have placed a motion before the House that makes it appear there is a problem and that the government should resign. Another member rose and said that is what Canadians want. Canadians saw him on television saying his constituents do not want an election and yet in the House he says precisely the reverse.

Why is it that those members cannot tell the facts the way they are? Certainly there are allegations, but the issue is not whether or not this side is delaying the work of the House. We want to work. We want to pass the budget. We want the committees to deliver bills to the House. We want to work for Canadians. All that the people over there want to do is see if they can get a quick one done.

The official opposition party simply flip-flops on every important issue to Canadians, such as child care, Kyoto and a deal for cities. What about housing? Every time an important issue to Canadians has been addressed in this place, the official opposition has been against it. Now it is changing its view again thinking that maybe Canadians will not worry about what it really is all about and what it really believes. Is that not the truth?

The truth is that the opposition has no position. It is a position of fuzz, one where it hopes Canadians do not understand what it is all about.

I am sure the NDP member has a few more thoughts to share with the House about the important work for this minority government, which in reality has to deal with things in the best interests of all Canadians.

• (1200)

Mr. David Christopherson: Madam Speaker, I would just put the question to you and anyone watching, does anyone honestly believe that if the Conservatives, the official opposition, were at 21%, they would be fighting tooth and nail the way they are to bring down this Parliament and get us out onto the hustings? No, they would be saying that we have to make this Parliament work. They would have a completely different tune. The fact of the matter is that because they suddenly have had a bit of a bump in the poll numbers, they are all excited and are thinking, "What colour do I want the drapes in my ministerial suite? What kind of automobile am I going to buy?" They have got themselves caught up in the fine taste of victory rather than rolling up their sleeves and doing the work of the Canadian people.

Mr. Jim Prentice: Just show us. Just do it.

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Mr. David Christopherson: The member thinks I might have something else to say, and I do. I would also like to point out that one of the beauties of this improved budget is that the leader of the New Democratic Party made one of our demands the whole issue of fiscal responsibility.

Mr. Rob Anders: Broadbent is so upset he is quitting.

Mr. David Christopherson: We got \$4.6 billion more going into social services and going into the issues—

Mr. Rob Anders: How come Broadbent is quitting?

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, do you want to get a leash for him?

The Speaker: We will have a little order in the House. The hon. member for Hamilton Centre has the floor. He does not need all the help he is being offered and we need to be able to hear him.

The hon. member for Hamilton Centre.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do not mind the heckling, but it reaches a certain point where it is a little bit much.

I was pointing out that fiscal responsibility is just as important to the New Democrats as the actual investments. We wanted to make sure that it remained a balanced budget, that there were no tax increases, and that we continued to pay down the debt. Those are priorities for us too. What we could not understand was spending \$4.6 billion on tax cuts that they did not have a mandate to do.

This budget deserves to pass. This Parliament needs to stay alive long enough to get that budget through. Then we will get at the Liberals.

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the point of order raised earlier today by the hon. deputy leader of the government in the House concerning the admissibility of the amendment to the motion to concur in the second report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. I would like to thank the hon. minister for raising this matter, and the hon. member for Mississauga South and the hon. House leader of the official opposition for their contributions to this discussion.

I need not remind the House that the Chair took under advisement on May 2, 2005 a similar point of order and I hope to return to the House shortly with a ruling on that matter, in fact later this day. However, while there are similarities in the two cases, I believe they differ in one important respect, and that is the matter of relevance.

As hon. members know, it is well established in our practice that an amendment must be relevant to the motion it seeks to amend. I refer the House to page 453 of Marleau and Montpetit. In the case before us, the second report seems to me to be very narrow in that it only discusses the payment of legal fees of public servants called to testify before the committee during its hearings on specific chapters of the report of the Auditor General of Canada.

[*Translation*]

It is true that the hearings deal mainly with chapter 3: the Sponsorship Program; chapter 4, Advertising Activities; and chapter 5, Management of Public Opinion Research.

[*English*]

However, the report does not focus on the subject matter of the hearings; rather, it addresses providing assistance to witnesses testifying before the committee. In short, the report addresses process, not substance.

Now the amendment that is being proposed does not address the same issues but goes far beyond the ambit of the second report. It reaches back into the subject matter of the committee's hearings, a quite different subject than the process under which it will manage those hearings and deal with the witnesses it invites to testify.

Accordingly, the Chair concludes that the amendment to the motion for concurrence in the second report of the public accounts committee is not in order because it is not relevant to the main motion it seeks to amend. Consequently, the subamendment cannot be proposed by the hon. deputy government House leader either because it is amending an amendment that is out of order.

Debate therefore may resume on the main motion.

● (1205)

Mr. Merv Tweed: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I would like to move a motion to amend. I would like to move that the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word “that” and substituting—

The Speaker: The hon. member cannot move an amendment on a point of order unless he gets the unanimous consent of the House. Is he seeking unanimous consent of the House at this point?

Otherwise we are resuming debate and my understanding is that the next speaker is the hon. chief government whip because I understood that there was a time split arranged.

We will resume debate with hon. chief government whip.

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to stand today to join in this debate. I move:

That this question be now put.

Mr. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order to seek some clarification. It is starting to get very confusing for the people in the House, let alone for people who are watching this on television at home. I wonder whether I am permitted to speak since I spoke to the original motion.

Are we actually debating the government whip's motion “That this question be now put” or are we debating the original motion?

The Speaker: Technically we are debating the motion “That this question be now put”, which gives the hon. member for Prince George—Peace River the right to address the House again. I know he addressed the main motion once but he may now speak to the motion that has been put before the House by the chief government whip, if he wishes to do so.

However, as the chief government whip technically made a speech, there will be five minutes for questions and comments.

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Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the whip for the government seems to have actually resisted the temptation to make a speech, and I have heard her make some very lengthy speeches. In fact, it could actually be said that a lot of what we are witnessing today in the chamber was touched off by the government whip's filibuster at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. This happened some time ago when I moved a motion to try to restore a single opposition day.

As most people understand, opposition supply days are those days where the three opposition parties—I should correct that. We now only have two opposition parties in the chamber. The New Democratic Party is obviously now fulfilling the role of the actual rump or the coalition partner for the Liberal Party of Canada. It is an equal corrupt partner in crime, as it were.

The reality is that what we are witnessing here—

Mr. David Christopherson: You guys don't even want to talk about public opinion. It's shameful.

Mr. Jay Hill: Obviously the hon. member from the New Democratic Party feels quite aggrieved at my statement that it is operating as a coalition partner to the Liberal Party of Canada but that is the reality we are facing.

The sense that I get is that when the hon. whip for the governing party was filibustering my motion at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs she clearly wanted to prevent the opposition party from ever bringing a potential confidence motion to this chamber.

•(1210)

The Deputy Speaker: Just to be clear, as the Speaker announced, there were five minutes for questions and comments. We are almost at the halfway point and we have to give equal time for the hon. whip to respond. If the member would wrap up his comments or ask a question, we will turn it back to the whip.

Mr. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, far be it from me to challenge that but we have been involved in debate all morning long and it seems to me that some of the hon. members from the government side have taken up almost the entire five minutes and they were not interrupted and told to make their point.

Why does the government whip feel that it is necessary in her role as a parliamentarian to bring in a motion to effectively limit not only the debate today but also ensuring that opposition parties are prevented from exercising their democratic right to express whether they have confidence in the government?

Hon. Karen Redman: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to respond to several issues, not the least of which is the question posed to me by my hon. colleague opposite.

Something very interesting and actually historic happened today in the House. A member of the NDP split his time with a government member. That happened as a result of a number of changes that were made to the Standing Orders, which are the rules by which this esteemed, historic place works. Those changes were made through discussions and through debate by all parties.

The Liberal government recognized that some of the heavy lifting had to be shared in a minority government, and there was a

responsibility on the part of the Conservative Party, the Bloc, as well as the NDP to make sure this place worked. After consultation and agreement, the Standing Orders were changed.

We all know there are opposition days in every supply period. There are six more to come. We simply put them off because, quite frankly, the Conservatives were caught doing something sneaky.

Yesterday the Prime Minister commented on the decorum in the House. I understand that in some of the public statements the member for Ottawa Centre made when he expressed his desire not to run again he also commented on the decorum in the House.

It saddens me to hear the kind of personal attacks, the kind of smearing, the kind of unsubstantiated testimony that the Conservatives drag out and parade as actual fact when some of these people actually contradict themselves in subsequent testimony. It is a sad day when this historic place is brought to new lows by a party hungry for power.

•(1215)

Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am prepared to split my time with the member for Niagara Falls.

In the short time I have been here and have listened to the people of the communities that I represent, there is a stench in the air. People are telling me that they have never seen a government so desperate and so hungry to cling to power that it will stoop to absolutely anything to maintain this power.

It bought the NDP with \$4.6 billion.

An hon. member: Bought and paid for.

Mr. Merv Tweed: The member behind me states it correctly. It was bought and paid for.

I want to give the House a little history on what happened in the past when NDP members were bought off by Liberal governments to sustain them in the power and the position that they held.

In 1972-73 and 1974-75, spending on federal government programs with this coalition jumped by 50%. Does anybody see any correlation with that to what is happening today?

In the two day deal, which the Prime Minister and the leader of the NDP cobbled together, I suspect written on a napkin in a dark room with a dimly lit candle so that no one else could see or hear what was going on, they committed to spend \$4.6 billion; that is billion with a *b*, to emphasize how much this means to Canadians.

During that same time of 1972-73 and 1974-75, Canadians saw their overall taxes increase by 52%.

When we ask Canadians today what one of the number one issues they are dealing with, they will tell us that it is the high tax rates because of a government that is willing to go to any lengths to stay in power. It will spend whatever amount of money is necessary. It will cut whatever deals are necessary with an opposition party to cling to power. We have seen it in the past and we are seeing it today.

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I also want to remind Canadians and this House that during that time the inflation rate more than doubled. It was also during that time that Canada had enjoyed for a decade a surplus that vanished overnight.

The agreement the government made with, I should be calling it the NDP-Liberal coalition, was made for selfish, self-serving reasons which the Canadian people are no longer willing to tolerate or are able to tolerate.

We have gone out across the country, as I suspect have the Liberals, and we have been told by our constituents that this is a disgraceful act, that it should be dealt with and that Canadians want to deal with this issue through this House in a confidence motion.

Again, we saw the antics of the House leader across the floor today. Her timing was absolutely impeccable. If I did not know better, it would almost surprise me as to how the exact opportunity was presented to the House leader. However I will not cast aspersions on anyone other than the government and the NDP Party that has put us in this position. The government is asking Canadians to support budget part deux even though no one has seen what it is even offering in the second part with the \$4.6 billion. Yes, we have heard words and comments that it will include this, it will include that and all good things and everyone will be happy, but there has been no detail.

I would suggest that the members opposite and the government of the day are very hesitant to bring this type of bill forward and present it to the public and actually have it bear some scrutiny so people can see what the government has done in a desperate attempt to maintain the control it has in this House.

● (1220)

It was brought up in earlier conversations: this government is asking this of the Canadian public, after all the allegations and charges that have been brought forward through the Gomery inquiry and other inquiries and other charges. It is saying yes, we know that it was Liberals who created the problem and we know that the Liberals are going to be punished, but in the interim, for the next 10 months, just let the same Liberal group continue to manage the affairs of the country and we will get to the bottom of it and sort it out. It was very disturbing.

It is similar to the question that I put forward earlier today when I asked the question about Enron going through all of its trouble. Do we suppose the people who owned shares in Enron said, "They know there is a problem, so let us leave them there and let them fix it"?

It is absolutely abhorrent that this group of governing people would allow that and would even actually think that the Canadian public would buy into it.

I am sharing my time, but I do want to relate one little anecdote that I heard when I was out in my communities over the last week. A gentleman sat down with me. I asked him if he thought we could afford to have an election right away. His comment was, "Can we afford not to?", based on what we are seeing spent by this government in a reckless manner.

He made another comment that I think is relevant to this entire situation where the government calls these allegations, but we call it evidence. These people are swearing under oath to what they know. People sometimes forget that. To throw out the word "allegation"; I am not sure that is the proper way to describe it. The gentleman said to me, "When you drive by a House and see smoke coming out of every window and door in the house and out the basement windows, do you go in and look for a flame or do you call the fire department?"

We are at exactly that point now in history. We have a Liberal government that is mired so deep in this scandal that it is willing to change the rules. The Liberals are willing to tell everybody in the world that "it is everybody but us".

The fact of the matter is, it is this government. It is this government that has to face that reality. It has to ask Canadians if they now have the faith and the confidence in the government for it to continue to manage the affairs of this country. I would suggest that Canadians do not.

Hon. Keith Martin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to the member's statements. As I said before, the reality of what is going on here, which I think most Canadians recognize, is that this is a political exercise. The role of the opposition is to get to government. We know that.

However, I think all of us recognize that there is a higher purpose for being here. Unfortunately, the opposition is trying to subvert a process that is going on to try to get to the truth. We are trying to say that we are not afraid of an election, but for heaven's sake, let us just pass the budget because there are higher issues at risk. What is at risk here is our ability to implement solutions for the homeless, for the poor, for business, for health care and for veterans.

Do hon. members think for a moment that the veterans out there who need health care, who need care because they have suffered from PTSD, care whether or not we have an election now or nine months from now? Do hon. members think that the person who does not have a home cares whether or not we have an election now or nine months from now? Do they think the person who is waiting two years for an MRI scan cares whether we have an election now or nine months from now? I would submit that they do not care.

If we do not allow the budget to go through, we are abrogating and violating the responsibility of the House to do the right thing for the Canadian people.

This government and this Prime Minister implemented a series of solutions to address the issues that have been found in the sponsorship issues of Quebec. Nobody could have done more. The Prime Minister called in the RCMP. He put in the Gomery inquiry. He implemented a series of solutions called the comptroller system, of which most Canadians are not aware. A comptroller general or counterparts in every department will ensure there is an oversight mechanism for all government expenditures. That is the right thing to do.

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I would ask the hon. member from the Conservative Party about the comptroller general system my government has put forth to ensure that government expenditures of people's money will be made more wisely and effectively? Does he not think that is a very good thing and that he and his party ought to support it?

• (1225)

Mr. Merv Tweed: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to answer that question. It was the then finance minister, now the Prime Minister, who removed the comptrollers from the financial controls of the government and who allowed this spending to go crazy the way it has in the past 12 years.

It is interesting that the member identifies all the problems in Canada that are all suddenly in front of his government. Where have the Liberals been for the last 12 years? Who created most of these problems?

All the member has done is confirm to Canadians why we need to have this government called before Canadians to let them actually see what the government has done in the last 12 years and let the public decide.

Hon. Jerry Pickard (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with care to my hon. colleague across the way. I recall that when I came to the House there was a Conservative government in place that was overspending by \$40 billion. The Conservatives had escalated the debt to \$600 billion. They tripled the debt, as a matter of fact. Their financial policies were never met. I remember a finance minister in those days who just could not even come close. It was suggested by a Prime Minister from across the way that in Canada we would have double digit unemployment past the year 2000. The finances of the country were dragged to the bottom of the core by that group.

The Minister of Finance and the Liberal Government of Canada of the day have turned that around. We are the envy of the world. I ask that member whether he would rather face the world today, with the way Canada is structured economically, or then, when we were called a third rate country.

Mr. Merv Tweed: Mr. Speaker, I want to remind the hon. member that when the Prime Minister was finance minister he gutted health care by \$25 billion in Manitoba alone. He was the creator of the health care crisis the country is now facing and that he now claims he wants to save.

Over 10 years he decimated health care to a point where it could no longer call on its lifelines to survive. The government had to cut a deal for \$41 billion just to restore the money that it took out of health care 10 years ago. I was a part of a provincial government that suffered. This is all very ironic. Having been a provincial government, we were accused of ruining health care. Now, suddenly, as opposition to the federal government, we are being accused of ruining it here. The government cannot have it both ways.

This government in the blink of an eye increased spending in the country by \$4.6 billion. Canadians will not accept it. I ask the members opposite to do the honourable thing and put the question to Canadians.

Mr. Jim Prentice (Calgary Centre-North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the motion before the House calls for there to be a confidence matter

before the House on the basis that there is "widespread and systemic corruption at the highest levels of the Liberal government, spanning many years, and revealed at the Gomery commission", and that the government immediately resign because the Canadian people have already concluded that it does not have the confidence of the House.

That is the matter that is before the House—

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, I would like some clarification. I thought the motion before the House was that the report be concurred in, the named report, and the amendment and subamendment were ruled out of order.

• (1230)

The Deputy Speaker: Just so we are clear on this, the motion that was proposed earlier was ruled out of order, as was the amendment to that amendment subsequently ruled out of order. Now we are technically dealing with the motion that the debate now cease. That is the motion we are actually debating.

Mr. Jim Prentice: Mr. Speaker, the motion I was referring to was dealt with earlier this morning. We are now back to the closure motion that was principally before the House prior to that time.

Essentially the same issue is before us as Canadians and that is the question of the legitimacy of this government's conduct. I would like to draw the attention of the House to what we have witnessed over the last several days.

We have had the spectacle of the Government of Canada in this House filibustering its own legislation in an attempt to delay the House, to introduce meaningless procedural mechanisms so that the House can never get to the real point that is before Canadians, which is the question of whether or not this government has the confidence of this House. Because if the government does not have the confidence of this House, it is not properly the Government of Canada and this matter should be put before the Canadian people for an election.

This is one of several tactics which this government has used. It has used the tactic of closure and the tactic of filibustering its own legislation. I have not been able to find and am unaware of any circumstance in Canadian parliamentary history or parliamentary history at large whereby a government would introduce filibustering motions to filibuster its own legislation to delay the House. That is a perverse use of this hallowed chamber, which we have never before seen in the history of this country.

If this government believes that it has the moral authority to govern this country, why does it not simply put itself before this chamber and allow a vote to take place? Instead, we have filibustering, delay and closure. Prior to that we have had the gerrymandering of opposition days to prevent the opposition parties from putting in front of this hallowed chamber the very question that all Canadians want answered, which is whether or not this government has the confidence of Canadians. It does not. We know it does not. It should submit to the judgment of this House.

Routine Proceedings

What Canadians have seen over the last several months in revelations from the Gomery commission is enough for Canadians to form the answers and the conclusions they need. As I door-knocked in my constituency, the way one individual put it to me was that "Mr. Justice Gomery may be the judge, but we the Canadian people are going to be the jury". That is very much the sentiment out there.

I would like as well to come to the question of the finances of this government. There is complete confusion in Canada today as to what the budget of the Government of Canada is. What is the budgetary policy of this government? No one knows. This House does not know. The Liberal members themselves do not know. The NDP members certainly are completely confused as to whether they have a deal or do not have a deal.

One of the principal and most fundamental traditions of this place and of our system of government is that the government must administer the public finances of Canada on a basis that has been approved by the elected representatives of the nation. That is a principle of parliamentary democracy that goes back a thousand years at this point in time. We are seeing this government abrogate that principle.

Approximately six weeks ago, a budget was announced here. In the last two weeks, that budget was reversed and changed. It was amended and then amended again. How could anyone with any credibility say there is a clear budget in place from the Government of Canada?

No one knows what the fiscal policy of this country is right now. That is a shameful situation. It is a situation that violates the principles of our parliamentary democracy. It also leads to questions in the financial and business communities and the community of all Canadians who make financial decisions. What is the fiscal policy? For heaven's sake, how are we governing ourselves as a nation?

Instead, we have the spectre of a \$4.5 billion buy-off of the NDP that seems to point us in the direction of an NDP-Liberal coalition. The last time we had that in this country we destroyed the public finances of Canada. It took us 20 years to dig ourselves out of the mess that we got ourselves into as a nation when we last had that kind of left of centre coalition governing this country. It cannot be allowed to happen again. It is a decision of the Canadian people. It is for that reason the question of confidence must be decided in the House. There must be a vote. We must have clarity on this issue.

• (1235)

When I travel in my constituency and when I meet people as I did recently, they are very clear that they do not support what they see from the government. The revelations of corruption from the Gomery inquiry strike at the heart of public confidence in our country. These are very serious allegations of fraud upon government, of public money laundering, of theft. These are all matters which are referenced in the Criminal Code.

The evidence we are hearing at Gomery, not from witnesses who have an axe to grind, but from witnesses who are senior representatives of the Liberal Party of Canada, is that there legitimacy to those accusations. Senior representatives of the Liberal Party of Canada have been stepping forward and saying that the Liberal Party has been complicit, has been involved, in that conduct.

Day after day we hear the Minister of Public Works stand up in this chamber and say that Canadians should not have this matter put before them, that we should wait until Mr. Justice Gomery completes his report. That is not what the Canadian public is saying. Canadians understand that the Gomery inquiry will carry on and that it will deal with what it has been legally mandated to do. The Gomery inquiry does not have the jurisdiction to levy criminal charges. It does not have the jurisdiction to make specific fault finding.

The consequence of all this is that Canadians have lost confidence in what is happening in Ottawa with the government of the day. The government has lost the moral authority to govern the country. That is part of the reason we have seen the situation in this chamber. Until the government has the courage to step forward and show Canadians that it is prepared to submit to a vote of confidence in the House, the situation in our nation will continue to deteriorate.

If the Liberals feel strongly that they have the confidence of Canadians, let them come before this chamber, submit themselves to the House and be judged. The elected representatives of the Canadian people, the members of this honourable chamber, will stand and will vote on the confidence issue. That is what Canadians expect and that is what we need to have at this point in time.

This situation cannot be allowed to continue. The government has taken itself to the very edge of constitutionality in the country. The government has taken itself to the very edge of history of our parliamentary traditions. It does not have the right to do what it has been doing. It does not have the confidence of the House. It does not have the moral authority to govern. It does not have the confidence of the Canadian public. Something must be done about this.

The motion that we have before us with respect to closure touches upon this. It is another procedural mechanism by which the Liberal government delays, obfuscates, ducks and dodges so it will not have to face the House of Commons and submit its conduct and its punitive budget, which has undergone three changes in the last two weeks, to the House of Commons and find out if it has the authority to be governing the country.

Mr. Charles Hubbard (Miramichi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am amazed at some of the talk coming from the opposite side. The party opposite does not have members from two of our provinces and does not represent three of our territories. One member talked about health care, The Liberal party attempted to bring forward budgets that were balanced, that were responsible, that would work with first nations and provinces to provide a fairly good health care system.

The party opposite was the party that voted and asked for more cuts to health care. It felt we had not cut enough. However, we did balance the budget over the years and we were able to provide a program that was good for the majority of Canadians and was to bring back confidence to our people so investors would invest and Canada would have a good economy.

In 1993 we inherited the fact that we were on the verge of becoming a basket case before the other nations of this world. Today we can look at a very low unemployment, a balanced budget and a great deal of confidence from our business community. I am surprised that people with legal experience, with business experience, would attempt to make such a tremendous issue of something that is before our courts and before a commission.

Routine Proceedings

We have to remember, in terms of our government and our federal organization, that the government handles more than \$350 billion in any given year. Going back over the last 12 years, we have to put into perspective the amount of \$250 million that was spent through the so-called sponsorship program. It is amazing that business people are looking at such a small percentage of money. I know it is a large amount of money. In terms of the total amount of money and the total number of employees the government has, it is amazing that a few employees would be so important in the minds of the opposition members in terms of what it wants, which is the desire for power.

Some 10 months ago we had an election. It cost the Canadian people about \$350 million. The opposition wants another one. Opposition members should look at history, at the needs of our Canadians, such as a good economy, a good outlook in our budget and above all, a responsible position that reflects Canadian society.

• (1240)

Mr. Jim Prentice: Mr. Speaker, if I might respond to comments of my hon. friend, whom I respect, surely it is specious in the extreme for the Liberal administration to suggest that because the allegations of fraud, theft, public money-laundering and corruption and conspiracy only relate to the theft of \$150 million, that we should not worry and that we should let that same administration carry on with the governance of \$350 billion because it was only \$150 million, is preposterous. The proof is in the pudding.

Canadians are entitled to watch the Gomery inquiry and draw their own conclusions. They do not need to be a judge, or a lawyer, or have a legal education to know, especially after Mr. Guité testified, that what we have seen is systematic corruption at the highest level of the Liberal Party where the Liberal Party and the Liberal government's administration of money has been corrupt and it has been intermingled. That is surely very clear to Canadians.

Let me come back to another point which was made. My hon. friend talks about Canada's finances in 1993. The issue today is Canada's finances in 2004 and what the budgetary policy of the Government of Canada is. I do not think anyone in the House knows what the policy of the government is on the budget. We had a budget introduced six weeks ago. It contained a certain set of parameters. Since that time we have had Mr. Layton and Mr. Martin announce a budget—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I would ask the hon. member to refer to party leaders by their position or by their riding name but not by their personal name.

Mr. Jim Prentice: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that comment.

The Prime Minister and the finance minister indicated the budgetary policy of the government approximately six weeks ago. Since that time, the Prime Minister indicated two different budgetary policies. As we stand here today, no one knows what the budgetary policy of the Government of Canada is, whether we are spending this additional \$4.7 billion. If so, none of this has been approved by the House. The House has not authorized even the budget that was presented six weeks ago, let alone two amendments which have been made to it since that time.

• (1245)

Hon. Keith Martin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I move:

That the debate do now adjourn.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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.

An hon. member: On division.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

PETITIONS

MARRIAGE

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have addressed the House on numerous occasions, defending the traditional definition of marriage. Today I rise in the House to present petitions on behalf of the constituents of my riding, Niagara West—Glanbrook, pursuant to Standing Order 36.

The petitioners urge the Parliament of Canada to maintain the traditional definition of marriage as the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others. These petitions are a small sample of the overwhelming correspondence I have received and continue to receive demanding the traditional definition of marriage. While I have received over 10,000 pieces of correspondence directly from my constituents, I have also received thousands more from Canadians coast to coast.

I remind my fellow hon. members from all parties to respect their democratic duty to follow the wishes of their constituents in this matter.

DIABETES

Mr. Jim Prentice (Calgary Centre-North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, juvenile diabetes creates many devastating health consequences, not only with a huge human cost but a large financial burden for the Canadian health care system and the economy as a whole, costing Canadians in excess of \$10 billion annually, making this one of the nation's most costly illnesses and indeed one of the nation's saddest illnesses. Today approximately 200,000 Canadians suffer from type I diabetes and these rates are increasing. Insulin is not a cure.

Government Orders

I am happy to table a petition today calling upon the government to direct funding of research, specifically targeted to juvenile type I diabetes.

MARRIAGE

Hon. Walt Lastewka (St. Catharines, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wish to deposit petitions bringing to the attention of the House that the definition of the House be the lifelong union between one man and one woman. These petitions are from the Hamilton and Niagara area.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Greg Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have yet another petition to present from the citizens of Grand Manan Island, New Brunswick. They are opposed to the construction of an LNG terminal in Eastport, Maine.

One could argue or question why we would have a petition against a project outside of our jurisdiction. The LNG project in Eastport, Maine can only proceed if LNG tankers are allowed to navigate through Head Harbour passage, which is Canadian sovereign territory.

Our petitioners are asking the Government of Canada to say no to the transport of LNG tankers through that very dangerous passage. In fact it is rated as one of the most dangerous shipping passages in all of Canada. They are saying that we should exercise our sovereignty rights and not allow this to happen.

To conclude, they are saying that we should protect the fisheries, protect tourism and the natural wonders that make their area special.

• (1250)

MARRIAGE

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition today on behalf of my riding of Mississauga South, signed by a large number of Canadians, on the subject of marriage.

The petitioners would like to draw to the attention of the House that the fundamental matters of social policy should be decided by elected members of Parliament and not by the unelected judiciary, and that the majority of Canadians support the current legal definition of marriage.

The petitioners therefore call upon Parliament to use all possible legislative and administrative measures, including the invocation of section 33 of the charter, commonly known as the notwithstanding clause, to preserve and protect the current definition of marriage as between one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Hon. Keith Martin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: I wish to inform the House that because of the ministerial statement government orders will be extended by 19 minutes.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

PATENT ACT

The House resumed from May 3 consideration of the motion in relation to the amendments made by the Senate to Bill C-29, an act to amend the Patent Act.

Hon. Keith Martin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a real privilege to speak on this particular issue which is close to my heart. Having been to Africa and seen the devastation wrought by an absence of primary health care in these countries, the devastation that AIDS has wrought, particularly sub-Saharan Africa, I want to say how important this bill is to some of the most impoverished, challenged and threatened people in the world.

If we look at the world right now, particularly developing countries, one of the top three challenges that developing countries have is: how do they get basic medications; how do they get medications that will save lives, prevent deformities from occurring, and just prevent people from becoming disabled.

In my experience I have seen this up close and personal in very tragic ways. Can members imagine that the absence of a few dollars for antibiotics could save a person's life, a person's limb, a person's hand, enable them to live a life, be employed, and be integrated as opposed to being shunned, dying, begging, getting sick or even dying? But that is what happens.

After receiving a simple cut that has become infected, we go to the doctor, get a prescription, and receive medications. If we were to go to many developing countries, the absence of \$5.00 of medications would do this: the cut becomes infected, the infection becomes septic, and then the doctors on the ground, if that person is lucky enough to see a doctor, have a decision to make, do they amputate that limb or do they let the person die? The absence of \$5.00 of antibiotics causes this crisis.

Having seen it, it is profoundly tragic to see people, young people, who have had their legs and arms amputated in the absence of \$5.00 of antibiotics that could be made for pennies. That is what we are speaking about here.

I want to move to the fact that people getting cuts in developing countries get simple illnesses that become fatal. The absence of those basic medications causes such trauma and such devastation that it results in mortality and morbidity figures that are well beyond what we would ever come to accept as being rational. This is the challenge that we are faced with.

This bill would enable Canada to take a leading role in ensuring that basic medications would get to developing countries to save those people's lives.

Government Orders

Can members imagine not having our children immunized? I have been to developing countries where measles, mumps and rubella are still a factor. We have just seen that polio has had a resurgence, and I have seen some cases. Can members imagine what would happen if we did not have medications in our own country? That is the reality of hundreds of millions of people, particularly those in sub-Saharan Africa where more than 750 million people live. The absence of basic medications results in the death of babies, children, adults, and mortality and morbidity figures that would be unthinkable.

Preventable diseases are not prevented. Simply treatable diseases are not treated. People die or are maimed as a result of that, causing devastating effects in those countries.

We know, for example, that in sub-Saharan Africa there are countries where up to 50% or more of the people are HIV positive. In Botswana 52% of the female population between the ages of 16 and 25 are HIV positive. That results in a massive death rate and a sea of orphans. Teachers are being wiped out on the continent. Who teaches children? Adults are being wiped out of the working force which is eviscerating the economic potential and abilities of these countries to get on their feet. All for the absence of a rational prevention mechanism, the absence of condoms and the absence of antiretrovirals that not only prevent the transmission from mother to baby but also prevents these people from living lives that could go on for much longer.

The cost of ARVs have gone down quite substantially and, as a result, this is something that is imminently doable. All it requires is for the international community to get behind this.

● (1255)

The bill should be passed forthwith. It would be an extraordinary example to the world, particularly in view of the fact that the G-8 summit will be taking place in Scotland this summer. It is important that the House pass the bill quickly, so that we can go to the G-8 summit and let it know what Canada has done so other countries could follow suit.

An intriguing proposal has come forward from Health Partners International of Canada in Montreal. This proposal would give a \$7 million tax incentive to pharmaceutical companies. We would then get from the pharmaceutical companies the equivalent of over \$132 million worth of needed medications. Those medications would be driven not by what pharmaceutical companies want to give, but by what countries demand. The medications would be demand driven by the countries.

Pharmaceutical companies are on side to do this. A \$7 million tax incentive would enable them to give \$132 million worth of basic medications which would save thousands of lives. A similar process is occurring in the U.K. right now with pharmaceutical companies there. It would be wonderful if we could take this plan to the G-8 summit and make it happen.

A lot of exciting things are happening in my government. This particular bill is not only innovative, but I would suggest that it is inspirational. It is inspirational because it deals with one of the most pressing, challenging and important problems affecting the poorest people in the world. Bill C-29 would provide basic medications to

the people most in need in the world, so they can work, go to school, and their children can live and grow up. Bill C-29 would save lives.

I hope all opposition parties will support this legislation because at the end of the day it will save lives. What could be more important than that?

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is quite evident that a bill such as this is reflective of the important business that Parliament is expected to work on. It flows from the same kind of initiatives included in our budget and in other initiatives. Bill C-29 is a bill which Canadians feel strongly should receive swift passage.

The member is well travelled and has been very active on the file. The plight of the unfortunate around the world has been a significant preoccupation of the government for many years. The principles which Canadians would like to see us reflect in the activities that we do abroad include such things as helping those most in need. That is why I am a Liberal. Our first priority is to help those most in need first.

I would like the member to comment philosophically on why he believes it is important for generous and prosperous countries such as Canada to make contributions internationally for the well-being of the citizens of other less fortunate countries, particularly children, and how that translates into long term benefits to Canada itself.

● (1300)

Hon. Keith Martin: Mr. Speaker, perhaps I can encapsulate it in one statement: There is only one race and that is the human race. We are all part of that one race.

As my friend mentioned, we are very privileged to live in a country that enjoys a very high standard of living. We have the best economy in the world right now. Most Canadians would recognize that not only do we extend a hand out to help those in our own country but we also go out to help those who are most impoverished.

We want to ensure that we do not somehow engender a system of dependency abroad. Extraordinarily, 40% of the world's natural resources are in sub-Saharan Africa. The people there are innovative, intelligent, extremely hardworking and dynamic. All that they require is an opportunity. They are subjected to torture, murder and the abuses of leaders who engage in actions that utterly violate the basic tenets of the code of international human rights to which most countries adhere. All they want is the same chances and opportunities that we have.

Through the international policy statement and by integrating defence, diplomacy, development and trade, we want to work in an integrated fashion to work with these countries and liberate their natural resources, so that those resources can be poured back in for their infrastructure and their health care.

Government Orders

We also want to increase capacities on the ground and that is where the Canada Corps comes in. The Canada Corps can be an institution that taps into the professional capabilities that we have here, from the young retirees to the young professionals who want to work abroad. Imagine if we got the Canadian Medical Association, nursing associations, the Veterinary Medical Association, agricultural groups, teachers associations and the universities together, so that those who wished could provide that expertise on the ground in developing countries and to provide the capacities on the ground that they so desperately need.

By encouraging and engendering that capacity on the ground with the resources those countries already have, with good governance those resources can be utilized for the betterment of the people and their countries, and then we will end the poverty that is occurring in these areas. We will end the cycle of poverty and dependence that occurs in some of these countries. That is the end game that people want.

There are obstacles, but we have solutions and ideas to implement and breathe life into those ideas. We will do it at the G-8. We are doing it at the United Nations. We are doing it with the AU. This is a very exciting time to be in foreign policy. It is a very exciting time to be in Canada. We look forward to implementing the best ideas in the House for the betterment of those who are most underprivileged in the world.

The Deputy Speaker: Before we resume debate, I wish to inform the House that I neglected to mention earlier that there are 43 minutes remaining for debate on the motion for concurrence in the second report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts as provided by Standing Order 66. Accordingly, the debate on the motion will be rescheduled for another sitting.

• (1305)

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to speak today to Bill C-29, an important bill for which the country can be proud. However, with due honesty and respect for the operations of the House, we must take responsibility for the bill's delay. It has taken over 550 days to actually do something for the world.

I want to revisit some of the history and impress upon the House that once the bill is passed we have an obligation to ensure that it actually has results. The changes in the legislation may not produce the desired response.

I would first like to start by thanking the Stephen Lewis Foundation and Stephen Lewis, as well as the NGOs, Doctors Without Borders, the HIV-AIDS Legal Network and a number of different organizations that worked diligently for years to get this to the forefront of Canadian public policy.

Unfortunately, the legislation has been fraught with a number of different delays that are literally causing suffering and preventing us from being part of a solution.

We need to recognize that in Africa, as one example, 6,000 people die from HIV-AIDS per day and 11,000 contract HIV-AIDS daily. When we first had the opportunity to address the bill it was back on November 6, 2003. The WTO made a decision in 2003 that gave generic companies a brief patent for a specific area that would allow

them to produce life-saving medications for tuberculosis, malaria, HIV-AIDS and other types of diseases that affect populations in third world and developing nations to be able to access newer drugs before patent protection expires.

It is important to point out that the bill would not even be necessary if the pharmaceutical industry would do more, take less profit and produce the drugs right now to get them out to those organizations and groups. What we are providing is the opportunity for the generic companies to fill that gap but that has created many complications.

The bill was first tabled as Bill C-56 in the dying days of the Chrétien government on November 6, 2003. It was not passed because of serious concerns by NGOs and health communities. It was really different in terms of its format at that particular time. A lot of people who came forward back then said that if we were going to be serious about this and pass legislation that it would have to be done properly.

What is really unfortunate is that almost two years later we are still faced with problems in the bill that we are dealing with today.

On February 12, 2004 the bill was reintroduced as Bill C-9. None of the changes and concerns noted by politicians, NGOs and health care advocates were changed in over three months since it was first introduced. When the bill died as Bill C-56 and came back as Bill C-9 there were three months in between where there was lobbying, negotiations and submissions but not a single word was changed in the bill. We were very disappointed to see that. We had been telling the government of the day that it had to make these amendments for the bill to actually work. Amendments included everything from delisting certain specific drugs and delisting countries so there would be a proper process.

This has been backed up by the WTO ruling that allows for that but the government has an ingrained philosophy for patent protection that is not necessary and has thus delayed and complicated the legislation. Hence we are still here today.

Bill C-9 was given royal assent on May 14, 2004 after the government finally made many of the changes required to make the bill workable. The only unfinished work was the regulations.

All parties in the committee worked very diligently together. There was a difference of opinion and heated arguments. I submitted over 100 amendments. We heard many different witnesses and had a bridging of differences by all political parties to at least come to a bill that would be moved at that point in time. There was a lot of pressure to get that done quickly.

Government Orders

•(1310)

On December 8, 2004, Bill C-29 was introduced in the House and was passed by the House of Commons on February 10, 2005, a little over a year from when Bill C-9 was introduced. I guess we are still seeing the problems that are delaying the bill, continuing to plague its final implementation. It relates specifically to regulations.

A lot of times I guess it is the technical elements that many Canadians do not understand. We are moving a lot of legislation, the mechanisms that really give it teeth and character, to regulations which are often outside the general workable parliamentary systems. When we move things to regulations parliamentarians give up the rule setting that often affects the effectiveness of a bill, the purpose of it and very much the character of it. That is what has happened to this particular bill.

Bill C-29 contains an amendment that would allow Senate committee members to sit on the committee that would decide the membership of the committee who would decide when pharmaceutical products would be eligible for export. There is an advisory panel that was created. As a New Democrat I cannot agree with the Senate. At the time I did not agree with it participating in the bill but it is being added. We are not going to object to it here but that is what happened. It went to the Senate. It was left out but it has put itself on it now as part of a regulatory body that will decide what drugs could be eligible.

This is where we get into a grey area and makes us very concerned about whether it is going to be effective or not. We could have certain drugs that may not be allowed to be vetted through this process, drugs that different countries could use to treat different diseases. There are often new drugs that have complex and different types of compounds that are brought together, maybe two or three drugs brought together, that are very effective in treating HIV or AIDS, for example. They are cutting edge drugs. They could be very effective. Their availability may not get listed but those drugs really could affect real positive change for people who are suffering right now.

I have to reiterate that it is because the expected profit margin in those drugs is so high the countries cannot purchase them. Government organizations cannot afford to distribute them. It is not all of the pharmaceutical industry. There are plenty pharmaceutical companies that are donating to certain programs but it is not enough. Once again, we are only having to do this because there is a wide gap regarding what they are willing to supply at low cost and hence we are asking the generic industry to fill the void for a small profit.

In March the government found a technical error that jeopardized the entire feasibility of the bill. It is amazing to look back after a year and a half to realize we have not seen the progress we really wanted. Once again it is really interesting to note that it has been approximately 550 days since this idea came to this place and it has been marred at the expense, I believe, of the Canadian reputation to participate in drug relief. It was interesting and really captured by the title of Jean Chrétien's aid to Africa bill but what people need to understand is that there are many nations outside of Africa that could also participate in the program. That is why we are hopeful it can work. There are other nations and I would give the good example of

East Timor. We had to fight to get it on the list. The country has suffered recently in the last decade because of genocide. It has had a lot of turmoil politically. It has had a lot of difficulty with regard to malaria and tuberculosis. It was left off the list.

This is once again where we disagree. The WTO ruling that originally created the ability for this to take place and for Canada to get involved did not call for a have to be list so we created lists that have caused some problems. But just so people understand, it is not just Africa that could benefit from the relief program but actually other developing nations that would find benefits if it works.

In summary, I just want to say that as New Democrats we very much support this. We want to make sure the government understands that there is an onus for us to steer this in Parliament. The fact of the matter is that it has taken so long to get to this point in time and place and it gives me some concern that if the bill does not work that we are going to wash our hands of it. That is a real concern because if we cannot actually have a bill that is practical and that works, then what was the point of all this?

I do not want to be part of a bad public relations exercise for the world. I want to be part of changing it. I think that we have the technology and the capability to have the generic industries fill a very important gap and avoid a lot of suffering. I know the previous speaker was very eloquent in talking about the fact that in Africa a good example is that it is losing its whole institutional learning infrastructure because so many teachers are sick and there is no one to train new ones as replacements.

•(1315)

When we talk with Stephen Lewis about what is happening there, we learn that it is literally children taking care of children. They are losing the parenting ability that they once had to tutelage them through difficult times in life, to be there for them and to ensure they can provide for their families. They are losing this institutional knowledge of how to even operate as a society because the professionals and all the people who make up everything from law and order, education and public safety related to infrastructure are being infected with HIV-AIDS and are passing away. They cannot bring people in quick enough or train them quick enough to fill the gap. It is a spiral. It creates conditions for greater disease and greater conflict. It also provides a festering of the disease that could be eliminated.

We need to understand that these drugs that we are talking about can provide the stability necessary so people can live in decency and live longer lives. They can then create the centre of gravity that is necessary for their countries to rebound from this terrible disease of HIV-AIDS. There are other disease such as malaria and tuberculosis that are affecting other developing nations. We can cure these diseases right now if people have access to medications.

Government Orders

There are terrific non-governmental organizations out there which are a great conduit. They have already built up their credibility in terms of the local communities to assist people with their medications. They have built up their credibility internationally to exercise the necessary procedures and the procurement of funds, be they donations from people, companies or governments. On that note I wish we would fulfill our obligations.

We have all of that right now. What is missing is the sense of stability that the drugs can create. This is something I hope the bill, if passed, will do. If we do not, we will be seen as very irresponsible. At the end of the day if the government has a bill that does not work, then we will have misled the world for the past two years. We have then provided a false sense of hope.

There is an obligation on the members of this House to watch very diligently what is happening. We should not just put it to regulations or send it to a committee that might report back once every three years as I believe is in the legislation. If the legislation does not work, if the generic industries cannot get the deals they need and if the government agencies and the NGOs cannot get the programs underway, then we must revisit this as a priority.

What we have done is created a whole set of expectations. I do not want to be a part of a country that cannot fulfill those expectations.

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the remarks made by the New Democratic Party's spokesperson. I want to state unequivocally that the official opposition supports Bill C-29. The Senate amendments to this bill are very important.

For clarification, the first part of Bill C-29 amends the act to allow the other place and not just the House of Commons to assess and recommend potential candidates for the committee of experts. The second part of the act deals with patent fees and entity size.

All of this deals with trying to address the necessary drugs to combat AIDS in Africa. Certainly it is a very worthwhile initiative of the former government. It is interesting that it was former Prime Minister Jean Chrétien who undertook this initiative some time ago. Yet here we are in this Parliament, long after Mr. Chrétien has departed, still debating amendments to this piece of legislation.

Despite our support for the amendments to the legislation, I am very concerned about the time lapse we are dealing with. I wonder if my colleague is likewise concerned and questions why it would take so long to get this legislation in place.

One of the amendments, by the way, came about because of the Conservative Party's intervention at the committee stage. It shows that the Conservatives have been very involved in this process, just as the other parties have been involved. I do not think any of the political parties in this place has a monopoly on compassion, not only compassion for those in need here in Canada but compassion for those who suffer in faraway lands.

I wonder if my colleague from the New Democratic Party shares my concern. In the past government, not only under Prime Minister Jean Chrétien but also since the existing Prime Minister took over the reins of power, the Liberal Party, unlike now, enjoyed a majority. It certainly had the wherewithal to force through all sorts of legislation. It had that power and used it quite often. I have been here

for almost 12 years now and I certainly saw the Liberals exercise that power by closing down debate on some controversial pieces of legislation.

It strikes me as odd that on something that has such wide-ranging support, the government would be reluctant to move that expeditiously through the process. It could have put it through in the last Parliament. The actual legislation could have been drafted properly so that we did not have to come back with another piece of legislation like Bill C-29 to make amendments to it to try and perfect it, as my colleague from the New Democratic Party has pointed out.

I am curious as to whether he, like me, is concerned about the time lapse and questions why the Liberal government would not have put this through long ago.

• (1320)

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, first I want to go back to when it started. I believe that we have gone about the whole bill in the wrong way.

Regarding the WTO and the TRIPS agreement, we brought in an expert from the United States who has served the United Nations for years, and from the testimony, we did not have to construct this complex legislation in many people's professional opinion. That was the choice we made. It was something we felt quite differently about from most of the other parties, but we all worked together to create something.

Instead of casting blame at this point in time, and I am very frustrated over it myself, we should look at the numbers. Over three million Africans have died and over five million have contracted HIV-AIDS since the government first brought the bill forward. Those are just general numbers.

We need to make sure on a regular basis that the bill is working and what we are going to do immediately to change it if it is not. That might require going up against some industrial issues. There is a wide range of opinion in the House of Commons. If we really believe in this, we need to make sure that the results are actually there. That is why we need to have a greater involvement.

I have been very disappointed to this point. It puts our country's credibility at risk in terms of the world and there is a demoralizing aspect as well if, at the end of the day, we have a bill that is not successful and we have delayed it even longer. Many Canadians have connections to developing nations and many Canadians have strong connections to non-government organizations. We could be great facilitators. If we miss this opportunity, we are going to regret it. It would be a moral blow to this nation and more important, it would make people suffer needlessly.

We have the ability to take corrective action. We would be remiss if we did not exercise that to make sure that this actually leads to drugs getting to people. Not a single pill has reached anyone yet, despite the two years it has taken to get this far. We need to make sure that at the end of the day medications get into the hands of people who are suffering.

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

Some hon. members: Question.

Government Orders

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried unanimously.

(Motion agreed to, amendments read the second time and concurred in)

* * *

• (1325)

QUARANTINE ACT

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (for the Minister of Health) moved the second reading of, and concurrence in, amendments made by the Senate to Bill C-12, an act to prevent the introduction and spread of communicable diseases.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of State (Public Health), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, increased population mobility and its relation to the rapid spread of disease is a heightened concern in today's globalized world. Our recent experience with SARS, the arrival of an avian influenza, and the looming threat of the influenza pandemic are stark reminders that public health is a cross-border issue of growing importance. A serious communicable disease can now spread to any part of the globe in less than 24 hours.

Although the principle of uncertainty prevails in global public health, officials do know that economic and psycho-social upheaval is contingent on how virulent the virus is, how rapidly it spreads from one person to another, the capacity for early detection, and how effective preventive control measures prove to be.

[*Translation*]

The challenge is containment, and the ability to block the disease in question will depend on vigilant monitoring activities at the borders. We will also have to depend on efforts by out-of-country partners for such things as health care delivery, hospital isolation of infected persons and quarantine of potentially exposed individuals.

Although the present public health system has served Canadians well, the time has come to update our legislation so that it better reflects the changes required for preparation and emergency intervention in this 21st century.

In response to this new risk and this threatening environment, the Government of Canada has moved promptly to modernize the Quarantine Act, which is one of the oldest pieces of Canadian legislation.

[*English*]

Bill C-12 plays a paramount role in the management of emerging and re-emerging threats to public health. Administered at Canadian points of entry, it is the first line of defence in protecting Canadians from the importation and spread of a communicable disease. It provides the Government of Canada with modern tools and additional authorities to ensure a rapid and effective response capacity in the event of our next public health crisis.

Members may recall that the Standing Committee on Health made significant contributions toward strengthening this bill. During the

examination process members listened to the issues raised by external stakeholders and put forward amendments to reflect their areas of concern. Acknowledging the efforts and commitment of our committee members, the House passed Bill C-12, as amended, on December 10, 2004.

In keeping with the parliamentary process, the Senate of Canada recently completed its legislative review of Bill C-12. As a result of this process the Senate Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology introduced amendments pertaining to the tabling of regulations before Parliament.

Simply put, the Senate of Canada passed Bill C-12 on the condition that the Minister of Health lay proposed quarantine regulations before both chambers. This amendment reflects equal status for both Houses in parliamentary oversight of the regulation making process.

Further, the governor in council may only make a regulation under section 62 of the newly proposed quarantine act if both Houses have concurred in reports from their respective committees approving the proposed regulation, or a version of it amended to the same effect.

In the spirit of collaboration, it is my hope that members of the House of Commons will find merit in the work previously undertaken by the Senate of Canada and will concur with the adopted amendments to Bill C-12.

With this said, I wish to demonstrate continued support for this very important piece of health protection legislation. Today I stand before my fellow colleagues imparting that it is our collective responsibility to move Bill C-12 forward in the global interests of public health and the health and safety of Canadians.

• (1330)

Mrs. Carol Skelton (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I rise on behalf of my constituents and the Conservative Party of Canada to speak to the amendments to Bill C-12, the Quarantine Act.

We have passed a series of amendments from our colleagues in the other place with the intent of approving the bill we sent to them. We have reviewed these proposals and agree with them. The amendments will bring additional oversight and accountability to this important legislation, which was lacking in the version the government has sent them before.

For the benefit of those who do not have the bill text before them, I will get to the heart of these amendments.

The original bill did not call for the oversight of both Houses of Parliament, but the proposed amendments would correct this. Should the Quarantine Act need to be enforced, this extra layer of prudence would be essential in ensuring the proper application. In addition, the amendments also call for and facilitate the ability to have public meetings and hearings regarding the act and its applications.

Once again, I welcome this change. It adds an extra layer of protection for Canadians affected and also allows for a broader consultation process. I would expect that at these hearings, if ever held, it would allow experts and affected Canadians to be heard. I support this approach.

Government Orders

I have been hearing many things regarding our preparedness for such a situation and the news at times is not encouraging. Recently I met with firefighters who informed me that over 70% of them do not have the necessary nuclear, biological and chemical emergency training. This worries me greatly, especially as I have had emergency preparedness training and know how important it is for first responders to have the training and tools to do their jobs. If they fail, so do those who follow.

I call upon the government to step forward and ensure that this training takes place as soon as possible. The next pandemic can take place at any time, and this training takes time. Such emergency training also needs to take place for those in our hospital emergency rooms.

Recently I met with our next generation of doctors. They have said that they would welcome this training, but believe that it is also essential. They and I agreed that if medical students were paid to take the training during their academic recess, they would graduate with proper training. What would be better than having our next generation of doctors enter service fully trained and without reducing current staffing levels in the process?

The legislation is just a piece of paper. It alone cannot protect Canadians. It is the people behind it who need to be prepared. In a pandemic situation, running through the streets and waving copies of this bill will not make us safe. Proper training and resources will. My colleagues and I will support the amendments, but we also will do so at the same time that we call for further action; action, not words.

SARS proved that hindsight is twenty-twenty. SARS has also proved that pandemics can cost human lives. Let us not repeat those mistakes.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to make a comment. I think the House is prepared to address the Senate amendments favourably, but the member did raise an ancillary issue with regard to the training for firefighters and other the first responders.

We had the opportunity to deal with the firefighters. I fully support their requests for the necessary funding for the training to ensure that they can protect the best interests of Canadians as they go about their business.

There are other issues such as the public safety officers' compensation fund, the amendments to the Canada pension plan system and I believe there was one other issue, but suffice it to say that in this place, the Canadian firefighter is held in very high esteem.

• (1335)

Mrs. Carol Skelton: Mr. Speaker, I agree with my colleague totally, but I also want to remind him that besides the firefighters, we have all other emergency personnel at whom we have to look very seriously. The general population has to accept that these people are in a continuous line of fire and that there is always a chance for them to develop disabilities because of their positions. I hope the bill goes one step further in protecting all the people whom we need to protect us.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have been dying for a long time to speak to Bill C-12, the Quarantine Act. I would like to thank my party's whip for enabling me to speak to a bill as fascinating as it is scientifically interesting.

We spent several committee sessions studying this quarantine bill. We were generally in favour of modernizing an act that dated back to the 19th century. It had been passed at a time when methods of transportation were developing especially quickly, including ships, which played a major role. Over all the years since then, new transportation methods have developed and new technologies have emerged. Nowadays, there are trains, airplanes, and even high-speed trains.

When one speaks about globalization and the heightened, ongoing and increasingly worldwide contacts among people, it becomes apparent that travel is no longer a marginal phenomenon. If we were to do a little poll here by show of hands to determine how many of us have visited one, two, three or four continents, we would soon see that travel is not unusual. People are obviously in closer contact than in the 19th century. There was an urgent need, therefore, to modernize the Quarantine Act.

Throughout the committee hearings, my colleague, the member for Laval and I were concerned about how frequently the wording of act left a lot of discretionary room to quarantine officers. For example, there were often no references to notions of time and accountability. The amendment that was clearly most often formulated by all the parliamentarians in committee had to do with the fact that there was no mention of the expression reasonable and probable cause, which is well defined in law.

We therefore tabled several amendments. We made the bill more acceptable and were in favour of its general arrangement.

Before going into greater detail about this bill, it should be recalled that we had two major reasons for concern.

The first was that the Minister of Health can designate the quarantine zones. This means that if there is an epidemic or pandemic, the Minister of Health can designate an area to be quarantined on his own without referring to his counterpart responsible for health and social services in Quebec, New Brunswick or any other province. The Bloc Québécois introduced an amendment on this matter, but it was unfortunately not accepted by the government.

We were disappointed to see that the government had not read our study asking for a quarantine zone. Of course, quarantine zones are often located in places such as airports, which do not pose any problems, because these come exclusively under the federal government's jurisdiction.

However, if a quarantine zone were established in a location that does not come under the federal government's jurisdiction, our critic on intergovernmental affairs would surely rise in this House and say that the government does not respect jurisdictions. He would be justified to do so. I should add that he is a vigilant person with a very keen mind, and we would never want him to be placed in quarantine.

So, we were concerned that the federal government might decide alone to designate a quarantine zone, without consulting authorities in the provinces affected.

We also had concerns about the medical technology. The real novelty in this bill is that the minister will designate certain persons. We wondered who these persons would be. Would they be doctors, nurses or health care professionals? Currently, it is primarily those who make initial contact with newcomers, such as customs officers and others. It is mostly they who control access at our borders when people arrive here.

● (1340)

We wondered what skills and conditions would be required to exercise the powers provided under Bill C-12. I will read clause 14, which is probably the most important provision in this legislation:

Any qualified person authorized by the Minister may, to determine whether a traveller has a communicable disease or symptoms of one, use any screening technology authorized by the Minister that does not involve the entry into the traveller's body of any instrument or other foreign body.

Of course, I sensed for a moment that all sorts of fantasies had gone through my colleagues' minds, but let us keep things at a medical level.

The expression "any...person authorized" was too vague and it was important to be more specific. As for the expressions "any screening technology" and "entry...of any foreign body", hon. members will admit that they are very general. The Bloc Québécois, ever mindful of its responsibilities, tabled an amendment to refer instead to "appropriate medical technologies". This amendment sought to set some limits.

The bill proposes a number of new points. For example, a new requirement applies to the operator and crew of conveyances. These may be planes, boats or land vehicles. They are required to report all cases of illness or death on board before their arrival in Canada. It is understandable that those responsible for these means of transport might be able to identify possible sources of infection. It is an act of civic duty—the obligation to report them—now enshrined in the law. The aim of the mandatory reporting is obviously to prevent the spread.

Clause 15 is also of some importance. It concerns the obligation on travellers who believe themselves to have a communicable disease or have been in contact with a person with a communicable disease. They must present themselves to a quarantine officer on arrival or departure. Initially it was felt that this should be a voluntary measure and not a requirement. A person who thinks they have malaria, German measles or measles is required to present themselves to the quarantine officer on their arrival or departure. Obviously, the quarantine bill concerns people from outside coming to Canada.

This is a fascinating bill. We have studied it for two weeks.

An hon. member: More than two weeks.

Mr. Réal Ménard: My colleague says it was more than two weeks. Time passes so quickly in good company. However, I think we may have spent three weeks examining a bill as fascinating as the quarantine bill. We would not have wanted to be elsewhere.

Government Orders

Clause 47 of the bill speaks of the power to inspect all conveyances arriving in Canada and the granting of the means to act, if necessary. Finally, it concerns the possibility of conveyance inspection, but it goes further. Not only may a conveyance be inspected, it may be rerouted. That means it can be asked to turn back and leave Canada if there are reasons to believe it could be a vector of transmission.

Before I go any further, I would like to speak of a debate that took place in committee. The bill provides for the establishment of quarantine zones, which were first thought to be airports, but which could be other sites. We asked the following question in committee with respect to quarantine zones: if a quarantine zone is established and 300 people are put in quarantine there and prevented from earning their living for one, two or three days, should they not be compensated? Should they not receive some financial compensation to ensure no prejudice? The bill is a little unspecific. It was a little slack, if I may put it that way. It was felt that the minister could provide compensation.

● (1345)

So things were left a bit fuzzy, you might say.

The question arose as to whether the minister ought not to be required to compensate people quarantined. Our Conservative friends, in an uncharacteristic attack of generosity, brought in an amendment to require the minister to compensate them. I would not want my colleagues to think that the amount of compensation was cut and dried. It was to be determined by regulation.

There was quite a debate in the committee, and people were divided, some in favour, some opposed. We in the Bloc Québécois reached a middle of the road conclusion, a balanced position. We cannot define ourselves otherwise than as agents of balance, a kind of political homeostasis which has always been greatly appreciated where we come from.

We had agreed that those quarantined deserved compensation, but the extent of it needed to be determined. Of course, if 10,000 people were involved, the public treasury would be sorely taxed. We did not want to adopt any excessive measures, so we indicated our agreement with the principle but linked to it the concept of reasonable criteria as they exist in law for situations where it is required. All in all, it was a great debate, as the member for Verchères—Les Patriotes has said.

Government Orders

Now, to move on to a very important clause in the bill, clause 44. This deals with the obligation for cadavers, body parts and other human remains imported into Canada to be accompanied by a death certificate, with the exception of cells, tissues and organs for transplantation. This clause requires some serious consideration. Deaths may even occur on board an aircraft or other carrier. The possibility of vectors of contamination connected with cadavers must not be treated lightly. That is why this obligation is there. I know my colleagues will address the justification of such a clause as seriously as I.

It is indeed possible that bodies may be on a plane or other means of transportation. Our transportation critic ought to look into this in depth, because those things do happen.

Moving on, while taking this bill very seriously, as we should. Clause 30 of the bill was certainly the source of some concern for us. It states, "The minister may, on the minister's own motion, review any decision of a quarantine officer to detain a traveller and... order the traveller's release."

I must say that the committee heard a law professor from Dalhousie University, which usually produces very fine lawyers, while not as fine as those from the University of Ottawa or Laval University. It is almost a tie between Dalhousie and Laval.

Allow me to digress briefly. This year marks a milestone in the history of Laval University, which is celebrating the 350th anniversary of its foundation. This calls for a round of applause for everyone who graduated from that university, to which we owe valued members like the member for Verchères—Les Patriotes, who is renowned for his rigour and patience, and the member for Témiscamingue, who was interested in civil law but eventually went into criminal law. Indeed, being comfortable with legal aid issues while not minding taxation and free trade issues whenever possible was one of this member's strengths.

• (1350)

Coming back to the bill. I would not want to get sidetracked, because the rule of relevance could be applied.

We were concerned about the possibility that a person could be detained in detention for more—

An hon. member: Placed in detention.

Mr. Réal Ménard: I am sorry. That was a slip of the tongue.

An hon. member: A pleonasm.

Mr. Réal Ménard: A pleonasm, indeed. Let me reword that. This is almost like in a courtroom, with all the objections. I am happy to have an attentive audience.

We were concerned about the possibility that a person placed in detention could be detained for more than 48 hours. We had concerns about the principles of natural justice and, basically, the fact that these individuals could not seek legal advice and that the reasons for detaining them were not clear, especially since, initially, the bill did not really provide for the possibility of appealing decisions.

We know the importance in law of the ability to review decisions. All my colleagues in this House are indignant about the fact that the Immigration Act passed last year abolished the refugee appeal division. It should be recalled that the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration at the time, the member for Bourassa, promised that the situation would be corrected. Another minister has now moved to immigration. We are on our third incumbent in this position, and the right to appeal to the refugee division still has not been re-established.

All my colleagues share with me the deep indignation of these people over such a violation of a principle of natural justice, namely the right to appeal a decision and have it reviewed.

Immigration is not an unimportant matter. There are four great immigrant countries in the world: Canada, the United States, New Zealand and Australia. Immigration is important. This issue brings us back to our national sovereignty project. In immigration, there are two great problems, two great visions of the integration of Neo-Quebeckers.

We in the Bloc Québécois have always felt that the future had to be built with immigrants. I would like to take advantage of this opportunity, by the way, to pay tribute to our critic for immigration, the member for Vaudreuil-Soulanges.

I would like to finish by saying that the immigration issue takes us back to the two major ways of integrating people. There is Canada's multiculturalism model, where people are led to believe that we can keep our own culture, regardless of our country or place of origin. Then there is the Quebec model with its shared public culture. Gérald Godin, formerly the member for Mercier, used to say, "There are 100 ways to be a Quebecker, but the important thing is to be one in French". That is why, in Quebec, French plays an integrating role in regard to the shared public culture and why we had Bill 101. The father of Bill 101, the former member for Bourget, Camille Laurin, occupies a special place in our hearts.

That said, all my colleagues will understand that the connection I wanted to make between immigration and quarantines is the following. In a country that welcomes a lot of people—on October 1 every year, Canada announces its immigration plans and last year the figure was 248,000—it is very important to ensure that the most judicious measures are taken but not measures that infringe on human rights. That is why the Bloc Québécois tabled amendments to Bill C-12, because it seemed to us that we should seek a better balance.

• (1355)

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to commend the hon. member for Hochelaga on his oratorical skills. It is always a pleasure to hear him speak. I would, however, like him to make a few clarifications.

With respect to this Quarantine Act, he told us about a concern over dead bodies that might be on a ship. What is the concern? Should there be concern over dead animals? Might they pose a danger to the public? How does this bill address these questions?

S. O. 31

Mr. Réal Ménard: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, the hon. member for Trois-Rivières, who is responsible for the status of women, for her very relevant question. I apologize for not providing more detail on this matter.

My colleague is asking whether we need to worry about dead animals. She will be pleased to know that we raised this issue in committee. From a strictly logical point of view—and logic reigns in every aspect of my colleague's life—it is quite possible for animals on board a plane, a ship or any other mode of transportation to be potential vectors of contamination. Hence the obligation to report and provide a certificate.

I would like my colleague to ask me another relevant question.

The Deputy Speaker: Perhaps she could do so after oral question period.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY

Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in Ottawa today, commemorating the 60th anniversary of the Holocaust, we will honour the Canadian community Holocaust Memorial Day with the annual wreath laying ceremony held right after question period on the steps on Parliament Hill. It is an honour to be participating with Dr. Joel Dimitri, my constituent and chairman of the event, and survivors.

On this day it is critical to acknowledge that the Holocaust shook the foundations of modern civilization with its acts of inhumanity, tyranny and horror. We must ensure that the Holocaust continues to have a permanent place in our nation's collective memory and that future generations understand the cause of the Holocaust and become guardians of the victims who perished at the hands of the Nazis.

We must also honour the courageous survivors, many who have told their stories. These lessons will have an everlasting effect on our youth. As Canadians we must reaffirm our strong commitment to stand up against any hatred, racism and tyranny.

I would like to thank all those who have volunteered their time and efforts to ensure the success of Canada's community Holocaust Memorial Day. I invite all members of the House to join us right after question period.

* * *

CAMROSE KODIAKS

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate and pay tribute to the Camrose Kodiaks Junior A hockey team. For the third time in five years, the Kodiaks became the Alberta Junior Hockey League champions by beating out the Fort McMurray Oil Barons.

Last Friday night, the Kodiaks defeated the Surrey Eagles 3 to 2 on home ice to also claim the Doyle Cup, the Alberta-British Columbia championship. This victory means that the Kodiaks are now off to the Royal Bank Cup Canadian Junior A championship.

Kodiaks coach and general manager Boris Rybalka proudly credited his players for winning the championship, but he also attributes their huge success to the staff, billets and fans. I can attest to the terrific effort of the players, the outstanding job of Coach Rybalka, and also the tremendous support this junior A team has from the Camrose community.

My family and I have thoroughly enjoyed every game we have been able to attend this year. I say congratulations to the Kodiaks and good luck. We will be rooting for them.

* * *

● (1400)

HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY

Ms. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is the second annual Holocaust remembrance day, when Canada pauses to remember the innocent victims of the Holocaust. Marked each year according to the Jewish lunar calendar on the day when the Warsaw ghetto uprising began, this day is a sombre reminder to us all that racism knows no limits and that its hunger cannot be sated.

Adopted last year by the House as an all party effort, this year I am proud to be the Liberal co-sponsor of yet another non-partisan motion highlighting this commemoration, a simple yet profound gesture that immortalizes the tragedy of the Holocaust in Canadian calendars and instills a sense of ownership in all Canadians to know its history and to learn from it.

Sixty years on and still we remain overwhelmed at the cost of this tragedy. Today many of us will have the privilege of laying a wreath on Parliament Hill during the special observance. The flame of remembrance is a ray of light that keeps undying vigil against the darkness of racism, a vigil that we need more than ever, tragically, in the face of rising anti-Semitism in Canada today.

* * *

[*Translation*]

MAISON MICHEL-SARRAZIN

Mr. Roger Clavet (Louis-Hébert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on the 20th anniversary of the founding of the Maison Michel-Sarrazin, I want to pay tribute to its founders, the late Dr. Jean-Louis Bonenfant and oncologist Dr. Louis Dionne and his wife, Claudette Gagnon.

The Maison Michel-Sarrazin named for the first surgeon of the king of New France, was the first of its kind in Canada. It welcomes terminal cancer patients and accompanies them in their final days surrounded by the beauty of the setting and the love of the 80 staff members, 350 volunteers and family members.

Quebec now has 15 such hospices sharing the mission of the Maison Michel-Sarrazin.

S. O. 31

Congratulations to Dr. Dionne and Ms. Gagnon. Their courage and determination have been vital in the establishment of their peaceful haven for those who are dying.

Many many thanks to the staff and the volunteers, because, without them, the wonderful mission of the Maison Michel-Sarrazin could not be achieved.

The Bloc Québécois congratulates the founders of the Maison Michel-Sarrazin on their great generosity.

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[English]

ONTARIO NEWSPAPER AWARDS

Ms. Beth Phinney (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wish to congratulate the 2005 Ontario Newspaper Award winners.

The *Hamilton Spectator* was the evening's major winner, with nine awards. Jon Wells was the recipient of the Journalist of the Year award and the Wayne MacDonald award for narrative writing.

The ceremony also recognized the work of *Hamilton Spectator* sportswriter Scott Radley, arts and entertainment writer Graham Rockingham and portrait photographer Scott Gardner.

Other award winners from the *Spectator* include enterprise journalists Fred Vallance-Jones and Steve Buist, and the business news team of Natalie Alcoba, Steve Arnold, Tara Perkins, Joan Walters and Steve Buist.

Let me once again say congratulations to all the winners. Their accomplishments bring pride and recognition to the city of Hamilton. It is through their work that we are continually educated, enlightened and entertained.

I wish the best of luck to the *Hamilton Spectator* journalists who are finalists in the upcoming 56th annual national newspaper awards.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as revealed in a recent *W-FIVE* program, criminals, even violent offenders, are more often serving their sentences at home.

According to *W-FIVE*, "Just look at what you can get away with in this country—without spending a single day behind bars. You can race a car down a residential street and plow into an innocent pedestrian, killing her instantly". The punishment? House arrest.

"You can take part in a random street mugging where a passerby is stabbed in the heart and left to die in the street". The punishment? House arrest.

"You can pick up a teenage girl in a bar, take her home, and gang-rape her". The punishment? House arrest.

"You can strangle your mother with a telephone cord". The punishment? House arrest.

"You can be caught with one of the largest collections of child pornography ever seized in Canada". That person can exploit children, go home, watch TV and order pizza. The punishment? House arrest.

When *W-FIVE* reporters asked to speak about house arrest with the justice minister, they were told it was a matter that was under study and that the justice minister was too busy with other issues like same sex marriage and the decriminalization of marijuana.

This justice minister should be fired and we should get one with real Canadian values.

* * *

● (1405)

BREAST CANCER

Hon. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Some time ago, Mr. Speaker, within days, I attended two events which were quite separate but were in fact related.

One was the Peterborough Run for the Cure, a large fundraising event to support the battle against breast cancer. At that event I learned that progress is being made against breast cancer. For example, I learned that it has been conclusively demonstrated that breastfeeding reduces the risk of breast cancer.

The other event was a breastfeeding challenge designed to promote breastfeeding and to raise community awareness of the importance of making it easy for mothers to breastfeed wherever they are. In the new economy and the new social reality, it is important that mothers with infants feel comfortable breastfeeding at home, at work and in public places.

We should all realize that breastfeeding is good for the baby, nutritionally and psychologically. It is also good for the mother's health, as I have mentioned, and for her psychologically. I urge all members to support and promote breastfeeding in Canada, especially the member for Madawaska—Restigouche, whose new daughter, Emilie, arrived recently.

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[Translation]

YOLANDE SIROIS

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like today to cite the great generosity of Yolande Sirois, who received eloquent public praise in recognition of her commitment and gifts to the community of Rimouski and the Lower Laurentians.

Over the past 10 years, Ms. Sirois has contributed in excess of \$325,000 in support of many agencies and institutions, such as the Fondation du Centre hospitalier régional de Rimouski, the Fondation de l'UQAR, the Musée de la mer, the Trimural du millénaire, the Centre polyvalent des aînés, and more.

Ms. Sirois' philanthropy was given well deserved praise at a gala concert in April. This mark of recognition becomes her, since she has also been a major contributor to musical culture by supporting the Concours de musique du Québec, the Fondation de l'École de musique du Bas-Saint-Laurent, the Concerts aux Îles du Bic and the Conservatoire de musique de Rimouski.

A thank you and congratulations to Ms. Sirois.

OLIVIER SIMARD

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in my riding of Gatineau, there is a young man with incredible strength. In 1999, he was told he had leukemia. That was some shock for young Olivier Simard, who was not even 12 yet.

This news was followed by countless medical treatments, including radiotherapy and blood transfusions, but that did not affect Olivier's will to live.

The foundation Les p'tits bonheurs d'Olivier was established in 2001. Its objective is to raise money for families who have children with cancer, and to organize activities to give joy and happiness again to these victims. As we all know, a positive outlook and a smile are the best treatments against this disease. To this day, over \$20,000 has been collected for this cause.

Today, I salute the courage of young Olivier Simard, who won this great battle, and the courage of his family. His will to live is an inspiration to us all. Today, at the age of 17, he is about to be declared free of the disease. Even though he has reached this final stage, he does not forget those who are still fighting. Through the foundation Les p'tits bonheurs d'Olivier, he brings them the smiles and the hope that will lead them to where he is now.

Congratulations, Olivier.

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[English]

IRON CURTAIN

Mr. Peter Van Loan (York—Simcoe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this week we are properly observing the 60th anniversary of the defeat of Nazi tyranny, but we must remember that this also marked the beginning of half a century of occupying Soviet communist terror for millions who lost their freedom as the iron curtain descended across Europe.

The Baltic nations of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were particularly brutalized. Hundreds of thousands were systematically murdered or sent to almost certain death in Siberian concentration camps. Millions lost their freedom.

As we mark the anniversary of VE Day, let us not forget the millions for whom freedom would remain only a dream for another half a century.

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[Translation]

BIRTH OF A CHILD

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take this opportunity to rise in the House today to announce the birth of my first child.

Indeed, on Sunday, May 1, my wife gave birth to a beautiful little girl, whom we named Émilie. Both mother and daughter are doing just fine.

I wish to thank the staff at the Edmunston regional hospital, including the nurses and doctors, for their wonderful work during the delivery and the days that followed.

S. O. 31

Canada's public health care system is one of the best, and I can attest to the quality of services provided when my little Émilie was born.

I will conclude by thanking the staff of the House of Commons, my colleagues and all those who congratulated me and my wife on the arrival of the newest member of our family. This was truly appreciated.

I am looking forward to holding my wife and little Émilie in my arms again, tomorrow evening.

* * *

● (1410)

[English]

HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today marks Yom Ha-Shoah, national Holocaust Remembrance Day. I rise to honour the spirit of the Holocaust survivors and the memory of the six million Jews who perished.

Let us join together as Canadians to denounce all acts of hate and bigotry directed at the Jewish community. "Never again", must be our commitment. Our actions against anti-Semitism and genocide must become a reality.

Anti-Semitism is on the rise worldwide. In Canada we have seen recent incidents of vandalism, graffiti, arson and desecration of graves. These expressions of hate are completely unacceptable in our free and democratic society. Incidents of hate against one community are felt by all Canadians, as these attacks threaten the very core Canadian values of diversity, equality, human dignity and fundamental human rights.

We must condemn all manifestations of anti-Semitism. We must never blame the victims. Canada can be a leader in the fight against anti-Semitism. New Democrats stand in solidarity with the survivors of the Holocaust, with the Jewish community and with all those who fight to eliminate all forms of hatred and discrimination.

We must work together to address this problem as a nation and celebrate and embrace Canada's diversity and commitment to universal human rights.

* * *

NATIONAL FOREST WEEK

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's, CPC): Mr. Speaker, National Forest Week presents an excellent opportunity to salute the over 360,000 men and women who are part of the Canadian forest products industry.

In my riding of South Shore—St. Margaret's, towns such as Bridgewater, Liverpool, East Chester, Caledonia and my hometown of New Ross are part of the over 320 rural communities across the country that are home to the industry and its employees.

Forestry workers can be proud to say that they are working for a world class industry, not only in terms of its economic significance but also with respect to its record of environmental stewardship.

Oral Questions

Canada is a leader among the forestry nations of the world. In fact, a recent study by Yale University found that Canadian forest practices are second to none in the 21st century.

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[Translation]

FOREST MONTH

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Forest Week has been a tradition in Quebec for more than 125 years. In 2002, this week was turned into a month. This is how May has become Forest Month.

Quebec's forests account for 20% of all forests in Canada and 2% of forests worldwide. Often referred to as lungs, they contain over 2,800 species of trees, bushes and plants. Not only do these "vital organs" provide habitats to thousands of plant and animal species, but they also act as natural filters for the water we use and the air we breathe every day.

During this awareness building month, schools, municipalities, businesses and citizens of Quebec are taking part in a variety of tree planting activities.

The Bloc Québécois is pleased to acknowledge this awareness building month, and we encourage everyone to promote our heritage, this valuable Quebec resource that our forests represent.

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[English]

PRESIDENT OF THE TREASURY BOARD

Mr. Inky Mark (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Mr. Speaker, these are sad days in Canadian politics. Yesterday the President of the Treasury Board said in a reference to me, "Frankly, if I was going to recruit somebody, I'd go a little higher up the gene pool".

My gene pool is 100% Chinese. This spitefully racist attack will not be taken lightly by Canada's Chinese community. This kind of thinking led to the passing of the Chinese exclusion act of 1923 that excluded all Asians from Canada for 24 years. This kind of thinking promoted genetic superiority and led to the Holocaust during World War II.

This racial attack goes against Canadian values. Canada is a multicultural society. We have come too far to take a backward step with the Treasury Board president. He cannot continue. Canada cannot tolerate this kind of behaviour from anyone. The Prime Minister must remove the President of the Treasury Board from cabinet.

* * *

CONSERVATIVE PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government has put forward a budget that will strengthen health care, the environment, national child care, our cities and communities and much more.

The Conservatives have flip-flopped and now oppose our ambitious agenda to better the lives of Canadians and in doing so they have revealed themselves. The truth is that the Conservative

makeover is actually a "fakeover", an attempt to hide their intentions which no one is buying.

The *Calgary Herald* says that if someone believes that the Conservatives support the Canada Health Act "you're a candidate for some pretty swampy real estate". An anti-Kyoto group says of the Conservative flip-flop on Kyoto, "I think it is certainly a political ploy".

If actions speak louder than words, the Conservatives' opposition to the Liberal budget speaks volumes about how out of touch they are with Canadians.

* * *

● (1415)

ALBERTA SCENE

Hon. David Kilgour (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, congratulations to the National Arts Centre on Alberta Scene. With 600 artists and 95 events at more than 20 venues throughout the national capital region, Alberta Scene is the biggest Alberta arts festival ever held outside our province, a perfect way to celebrate the centennial.

The artists will perform on a national stage, be introduced to new audiences and meet with more than 80 talent scouts, presenters and impresarios from across Canada. In alphabetical order, they include the following: Amir Amiri, Ann Vriend, Barrage, Carolyn Dawn Johnson, Crazy Horse Theatre, Corb Lund, Crystal Plamondon, David Hoffos, DJD, Gordie Johnson, Guys in Disguise, Ian Tyson, John Stetch, Nicole Mion, Oscar Lopez, P.J. Perry, Shani Mootoo, Shumka, SNFU, Terri Clark, the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra, Tommy Banks, who we all know, Tri-Continental, War Party and Wil.

The reaction from Alberta's artist community since the Alberta Scene launch has been tremendous.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Chuck Guité has now testified that the Prime Minister was involved in funnelling money to Liberal friendly ad firms. It has been an open secret around this town for 12 years that ministers have been selecting friendly ad firms.

Why does the Prime Minister not just stand up and admit that money went from his ministry to the firms that he favoured?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I testified in front of the Gomery commission, I have never interfered in the awarding of any contract.

In terms of the telephone call that was allegedly made, I never engaged in a telephone call or a conversation with Mr. Gagliano about this. Mr. Manley has said that he never engaged in such a conversation. In fact, this morning Mr. Gagliano said that the conversation never took place.

Oral Questions

What we are dealing with here is not just second-hand, but third-hand hearsay from a person who has since passed away. What I would suggest is the reason we would listen to Justice Gomery is so the opposition can stop trying to smear people.

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will point out that the Prime Minister is now depending on the word of Alfonso Gagliano.

Regardless of the Prime Minister's denial, here are the facts. Chuck Guité testified that the Prime Minister interfered in contracts and we know that money did flow to Vickers & Benson. Alain Renaud testified that the Prime Minister interfered and money did flow to Groupe Everest. Warren Kinsella and Allan Cutler testified that the Prime Minister interfered and money did flow to Earncliffe.

In every case where the Prime Minister was said to be involved, the money flowed. What other conclusion are Canadians supposed to draw from that?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have stated categorically that I have never interfered in a contract. I have given as clear and as unequivocal an answer as I possibly could to that question.

Since the hon. member wants to talk about ethics, twice in the House I have asked the Leader of the Opposition if he will stand in the House and tell us what are the names of the people that he refuses to reveal in terms of his own leadership campaign. If he wants to talk about ethics, then let him stand in the House and tell us why he will not be open and transparent.

• (1420)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the public knows that the Prime Minister is not credible. Chuck Guité said that the Prime Minister intervened and that Vickers & Benson received money. Alain Renaud said that the Prime Minister intervened and that Groupe Everest received money. Allan Cutler and Warren Kinsella said that the Prime Minister intervened and that Earncliffe received money.

Are these admissions true? Or is this some great conspiracy against the Prime Minister?

[*English*]

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, these are unproven allegations. Mr. Guité also made some other allegations yesterday. In fact, he said that the political interference in contracts “was worse under the previous Conservative administration. It was a cooked deal then, 150 per cent politically driven”.

Do the Conservatives agree with that part of Mr. Guité's testimony? If not, then why are they not willing to wait for Justice Gomery's report?

The Speaker: Order, please. It might be helpful if members remembered that we are in question period. We need a little order so we can hear the questions and the responses. I thought there was relative quiet in the House today at the beginning, but things are degenerating. I would urge members to try to restrain themselves so we can hear the questions and answers.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians know that the Prime Minister is not believable on the Vickers & Benson contract. The Liberals' hired gun, Chuck Guité, facing criminal charges and jail time, has finally broken his silence. He revealed how the Prime Minister let Vickers & Benson keep its ad contract for Canada savings bonds even after it was taken over by a foreign corporation. This violated Canadian ownership rules.

The Prime Minister was the boss. Will he just admit that he is not telling the truth about his involvement?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the opposition presents as sacrosanct the testimony of Chuck Guité, who faces both criminal and civil fraud charges. On allegations of alleged conversations between Mr. Guité and Mr. Tremblay, who has since passed away and is not able obviously to confirm or deny those discussions, and Mr. Gagliano, the man the Prime Minister fired, I think Canadians prefer to wait for Justice Gomery's report and not to rely on testimony from the dubious about the deceased.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Vickers & Benson helped run Liberal election campaigns. The Liberal Party saved millions by repaying such agencies at public expense with government contracts. The Prime Minister is busy denying his involvement, yet the multi-million dollar Vickers & Benson ad contract was with the Prime Minister's own department. It completely broke Canadian ownership rules, but he did nothing.

He was finance minister. He was vice-chair of the Treasury Board. He was the second most powerful man around the cabinet table. How can anyone believe the Prime Minister today?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the fact is Chuck Guité was hired by the previous government. Beyond that, the member for Calgary—Nose Hill is a lawyer and a member of the Law Society of Alberta. In its code of professional conduct, rule 3 says, “A lawyer must not act in a manner that might weaken public respect for the law or justice system or interfere with its fair administration”. She should resign from the bar.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Michel Béliveau, the director general of the Liberal Party, Quebec wing, has acknowledged that he asked for, and got, \$300,000 in dirty money from Jacques Corriveau, a key player in the sponsorship scandal. Michel Béliveau went on to say that the Liberal Party spent that dirty money in hopes of making gains in Quebec in the 1997 election campaign.

Since Jacques Corriveau got \$8 million in sponsorship contracts, will the Prime Minister admit that the \$300,000 in dirty money was public funds used by the Liberals in the 1997 campaign, in violation of the Elections Act?

Oral Questions

● (1425)

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as has been indicated on numerous occasions, we need to wait for Justice Gomery's report. There ought not to be a commentary on the day's testimony, in this instance more than ever, because the testimony on which the leader of the Bloc Québécois wants me to comment has not yet been given. Mr. Béliveau has not yet appeared. We need to at least wait until he has.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this is the same Prime Minister who, at this time last year, was saying that Canadians knew enough about the sponsorships and that an election was needed. He said that because he expected to get a majority and to have four years to make people forget the Gomery inquiry. That is what he thought, and that is what he wanted. He lacks both principles and credibility.

I am asking whether he is preparing to run a fourth consecutive election campaign financed with dirty money diverted from taxpayers' pockets? Is the Prime Minister not ashamed?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the first thing that this government did when it came into power was to cancel the sponsorship program. The day the Auditor General's report was tabled in this House, we appointed Justice Gomery. We have defended him because we do not fear the truth. We are open and transparent and we want answers. I assure you that those who have acted inappropriately will be punished.

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the money that was paid in cash directly to Liberal organizers was used for campaigning in Bloc Québécois ridings. Michel Béliveau said that cash was also used by Marc-Yvan Côté, chief Liberal organizer for eastern Quebec.

Is that not dirty, illegal, Liberal money?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, these are unproven allegations, like so many others. For example, it is alleged that the Parti Québécois government received inappropriate funds. Perhaps the Bloc can now agree with us that it would be a good idea to wait for the Gomery report.

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister and his Quebec lieutenant are the ones who have repeated, many times, that they would pay back the dirty money used by the Liberal Party. We simply do not trust them. It is out of the question for us to allow the Liberal Party to run another campaign with this dirty money. We want the dirty sponsorship money to be withdrawn from the Liberal Party coffers.

Will the Prime Minister finally follow through on the promises of his Minister of Transport and deposit this dirty money into a trust fund until the end of the Gomery inquiry?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the party has been clear, if it has received inappropriate money, it will reimburse the taxpayers. It is not possible to do so without knowing all the facts. Therefore, it would be a good idea to wait for the Gomery report.

[English]

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let me begin by agreeing with the Prime Minister that transparency and complete openness of donations in politics is very important. So let me ask about trust funds held by cabinet ministers in his government.

Will the Prime Minister require his ministers to reveal the donors to their trust funds to see whether or not there were any government contractors on the list?

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Deputy Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Minister responsible for Official Languages, Minister responsible for Democratic Reform and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Parliament has enacted Bill C-24, which allowed riding associations of all parties in the country to transfer any money they had into political associations registered with Elections Canada. As far as I know, that has been done and there are no trust funds to speak of.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I can see that the Prime Minister does not have the courage of his accusations when it comes to pointing fingers at others.

We know that sitting members of the cabinet had trust funds and that the donors were secret. Alfonso Gagliano had one and there are others.

In the name of the pursuit of honesty and transparency, will the Prime Minister give us the lists of the donors to those trust funds, so that we can find out who they were and whether they had government contracts, yes or no?

● (1430)

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Deputy Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Minister responsible for Official Languages, Minister responsible for Democratic Reform and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Elections Act is quite clear. All funds received have to be received and are declared.

After the passage of Bill C-24, if there were any funds in riding associations, these riding associations could register with Elections Canada and transfer all these funds, and that has occurred. As far as I know, there are no trust funds.

* * *

CANADA STEAMSHIP LINES

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians know that the Prime Minister is not believable when it comes to being transparent about his own business dealings.

The fact is that the Prime Minister failed to come clean about the 33 meetings he had with executives from his own shipping company while he was the Minister of Finance. The fact is that he also failed to come clean about the over \$161 million in taxpayers' money that was funnelled into his own shipping company.

How can Canadian taxpayers trust the Prime Minister when he himself has not told the truth about the benefits he and his company have received?

Oral Questions

Hon. Tony Valeri (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is another example of trying to drag people through the mud. There is not much more that can be said here.

The Prime Minister, whether we talk about Gomery or about the finances of this country, brought this country back from the brink. He balanced the books and made investments for Canadians that in fact benefit this country.

When it comes to the integrity of the Prime Minister, I would expect that Canadians will decide, and they have decided over and over again, that the Prime Minister is the leader that they believe has the ability to take this country into the future.

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we look forward to that decision because not only did the Prime Minister benefit from millions of taxpayer dollars being sent to his shipping company but he in fact altered the rules to benefit himself.

While closing tax havens in most other countries, the Prime Minister kept open a tax loophole that allowed his companies to avoid paying Canadian taxes. Then he amended private pension legislation to allow him to gain access to over \$80 million of the surplus in the CSL pension fund, all of which went right back into his companies.

How can the Prime Minister possibly expect Canadian taxpayers, when he is not honest with them about the benefits that he and his—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. I know the hon. member for Edmonton—Leduc will not want to suggest that any hon. member is not honest. I know he will want to withdraw that remark a little later. The hon. Minister of Finance may wish to respond.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, rarely has the House been treated to such a scurrilous display of character assassination as we have just seen from the hon. member. There is absolutely not one scintilla of evidence or justification to support that personal abusive attack upon the Prime Minister of Canada.

Indeed, in dealing with tax havens outside this country, his every move since 1993 has been to close them, limit them, and ensure the taxes in this country are applied fairly to all Canadians.

The hon. member is just a disgrace.

* * *

THE BUDGET

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it sounds like he is a little sensitive about the fact that the leader of the NDP has replaced him.

Canadians know that the Prime Minister cannot be believed, but the NDP is always the last to know. Too bad it was only after it struck a deal that the NDP realized the Liberals are sleazier than it thought.

The Prime Minister and the Liberal team even double-crossed the finance minister. If his own colleagues cannot trust the Prime Minister, then why should Canadians?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on February 23 the Leader of the Opposition indicated clearly and categorically that there was no reason to oppose the federal budget or defeat the government. Then later in April the Leader of the Opposition flip-flopped. He changed his position 180 degrees. Hand in hand with the separatists, he vowed to defeat the government and the budget at every turn. That is a huge betrayal of Canadians.

I ask the finance critic for the opposition, when will he do the right thing and resign?

• (1435)

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, how sad. The finance minister has been fired and he does not even know it.

Canadians know that the Prime Minister just cannot be believed on the budget. Back in February he told us the cupboard was bare. When his job is on the line, all of a sudden he finds \$5 billion. It sounds like he was not really giving us the true story.

When will the Prime Minister just admit that he has not been telling Canadians the truth?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. gentleman will find the space written specifically in the budget plan. I think it is page 285.

Since we balanced the books in 1997, we have had the best debt to GDP ratio in all the G-7. We have had the best job creation record in all the G-7. We have had the fastest growth in living standards in all the G-7. We have had the only balanced budgets in all the G-7. We have the best fiscal performance since 1867. That is a record I would be prepared to run on.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

[Translation]

The Speaker: That is all for that question. Moving on to the next, the hon. member for Repentigny.

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SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Jacques Corriveau is a personal friend of Jean Chrétien. He was on the policy and campaign organizing committees of the Quebec wing of the Liberal Party; Liberal organizer; bag man; sign maker; francophone vice-president of the Liberal Party; vice-president of the LPC, Quebec wing; and finally, lobbyist for the Liberal Party.

How, then, can the Prime Minister continue to justify himself by maintaining that the Liberal dirty money scandal was the action of a small parallel group, when Corriveau's involvement puts it right at the core of the Liberal Party?

The Speaker: I am sorry. I did not hear. The hon. member for Repentigny.

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, he is refusing to answer. Silence denotes consent. Corriveau provided the money. Corriveau drew up the list of projects that would get sponsorships. He was also the one who created the 10% commission system for Groupaction sponsorships.

Oral Questions

How can the government still refuse to put that dirty sponsorship money into a trust account, when we know that the dirty money was nothing more than a kickback system providing crooked funding for the Liberal Party of Canada?

[English]

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again the party has been clear. The Prime Minister and the government has been clear. If in fact the party has received funds from inappropriate sources, those funds will be returned to the Canadian taxpayer. That cannot be done without having all the facts. That is why it is very important that Justice Gomery be allowed to complete his work. The party will respond appropriately to that work.

Let us be clear. What we are doing here with the work of Justice Gomery is changing the culture of government. If we are to change the culture of government, it is worth the short term pain. I would urge all members of the House to support the efforts of the government and support Justice Gomery to change the culture of government.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, what needs changing is not the culture of government but the government itself. Guy Bisson, Jacques Roy, Louis Pichette and Franco Iacono, all of whom worked on election campaigns, deep in the Liberal Party's organization, have admitted to having been paid with sponsorship money.

I would like the Prime Minister to tell me what more he needs? Individuals have admitted to having been paid with sponsorship money. Does the Liberal Party not call that dirty money?

• (1440)

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, these are unsubstantiated allegations among many others. For instance, it has been alleged that the Parti Québécois received money inappropriately. Does the Bloc agree with this statement? If not, perhaps we could wait for the Gomery report.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there is no connection between the Parti Québécois and the dirt and filth characteristic of this government. The Parti Québécois has created a trust in which the questionable money is kept.

What we are asking of the government is to stop playing the hypocrite, open a trust account and put in it the Liberal Party's dirty money, which was used to steal the election. Let it put the money in a trust.

[English]

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again there are allegations that the Parti Québécois in fact received money inappropriately. Those same allegations said that the government of the Parti Québécois in fact was influenced by those inappropriate contributions. We know that the separatist cousins on the provincial level campaigned with those members on a federal level during elections. They worked together.

So before they sully the reputation of this House, they should look at their own house for a few minutes. They should actually get their

own house in order and have the courage that the Prime Minister has had to establish the Gomery commission to get to the bottom of this issue for Canadians.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Vic Toews (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is not believable on the court appointment process. He promised significant reform and he has broken that promise. Now, even his own party officials involved in the process are admitting that there was inappropriate political interference in the judicial appointments process in Quebec.

How can Canadians believe that the Prime Minister will do anything to clean up this corruption when he refuses to take these admissions of his own people seriously? Why does he refuse to do anything?

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are independent judicial advisory committees in each province. A majority of the representatives on those committees come from the Canadian Bar Association, provincial bar associations, provincial attorneys general and the like. Indeed, the hon. member himself was involved in those same processes in his province. Does he want us to go ahead and say that all the people in his province from all these institutions are corrupt?

What kind of drive-by smears are we going to continue to endure with regard to all these institutions in the country, in particular the independence of the judiciary?

Mr. Vic Toews (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the request is not a complex one. There are admissions of senior Liberal officials involved in the panel that there was this corruption and the government will not take any steps to take a look into that. That is all I am asking. That is all that Canadians are asking.

Why will the government not look into these very serious admissions of corruption?

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there seems to be no limit to the opposition's willingness to impugn every single institution that is represented on these committees in face of allegations that remain unproven. We have representatives from every single venerable institution in the country involved in the legal process.

I regard that as a shame that he is prepared to impugn not only the individual integrity of those individuals but all those institutions that he himself used to preside over.

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[Translation]

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Mr. Peter Van Loan (York—Simcoe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians know that the Prime Minister is not believable when he says that nobody but Gomery can tell us who is responsible. Justice Gomery's mandate explicitly states that he may not name those responsible for this terrible scandal. But that did not stop the Prime Minister from repeating on television that he wants to keep Canadians waiting until Justice Gomery's report has been tabled.

Oral Questions

The Prime Minister is putting limits on Justice Gomery's mandate in order to protect his Liberal friends. How can we still believe what the Prime Minister says?

• (1445)

[English]

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the mandate of Justice Gomery is clear. He is in fact investigating and reporting on questions raised in chapters three and four of the Auditor General's report. That is the first part of his mandate. The second part of his mandate is to provide prescriptives to prevent this sort of thing from happening again.

Beyond that, there are criminal charges against several individuals, including Mr. Guité and Mr. Brault, their favourite witnesses over there. Further to that there is a civil action to recover \$41 million of funding.

We understand the legal system. I do not know why that lawyer has forgotten so much of it in such a short period of time. We are getting to the bottom of this issue and we are supporting the work of Justice Gomery.

Mr. Peter Van Loan (York—Simcoe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are criminal charges against everybody except those who directed the operation. Canadians know that the Prime Minister is not believable in supporting the Gomery commission. Last spring the Prime Minister ordered the shutdown of the public accounts committee and called a quick election because he knew that Jean Brault was going to testify and spill the beans.

Liberals are already in court trying to shut down the Gomery commission right now and discredit the justice, so when the Prime Minister declares his support for Gomery, will he just admit that he is not telling Canadians the truth?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again what the hon. member is saying is false. The fact is that the work of the public accounts committee was going quite well until the chairman decided to go to Mexico. Beyond that, it is absolutely clear that the Prime Minister, who established Justice Gomery, and the Prime Minister, who continues to support Justice Gomery and who provided full access to cabinet documents and other documents going back to 1994 and provided \$72 million worth of resources to Justice Gomery, wants to get to the truth as do Canadians.

It is interesting that only recently they started attacking Justice Gomery's mandate because they fear that Justice Gomery's report will show that the Prime Minister acted honourably.

* * *

COMMERCIAL BANKRUPTCIES

Mr. Russ Powers (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am going to change the focus on the questioning today.

The current process for workers to recover lost wages from their bankrupt employers is both lengthy and unreliable. Many workers do not get close to what they are owed in the aftermath of employer

bankruptcy. This impacts all workers, but especially the most vulnerable, those who live from paycheque to paycheque.

Could the Minister of Labour and Housing please advise the House if the government is proposing to address this issue?

Hon. Joe Fontana (Minister of Labour and Housing, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member, the caucus and the government for caring about the vulnerable workers, men and women across this country. It gives me pride today to be able to announce that we will introduce a wage earner protection program that will help people who have lost their jobs through bankruptcy get all of the money that is due to them, unlike the Conservatives who, I just heard a half hour ago, would introduce a payroll tax to help those people recover their wages. That is absolutely shameful.

On this side of the House we believe in protecting men and women who work hard each and every day. We have listened to them. Labour leaders want this and we will deliver today.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Labour should remember that it was a proposal of the NDP that he just talked about.

I come from a riding where it is very hard to find work, from a riding where the people are loyal and want to keep their work. The Liberal government slashed EI in the 1990s after it promised that it would not do that. Before each election, in 1997, in 2000 and in 2004 the Liberals promised they would fix it and they did not fix it.

My question for the minister is, will they keep their promise and fix the EI problem for the workers?

[Translation]

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, the program my colleague has just announced was established in cooperation with the country's unions.

Second, the employment insurance program has been improved each year in order to meet workers' needs. Again this year, we made improvements through the budget currently before this House. We try to meet workers' needs regularly, and do so in cooperation with all partners in the community, including employers.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I think enough is enough, and this is enough chit chat. Had this government not spent taxpayers' money on sponsorships in Quebec, workers would have had some changes to employment insurance.

My question is for the Prime Minister. Is he prepared to give Canadian workers the 12 best weeks? Yes or no? Or is he going to invest in sponsorships again?

Oral Questions

●(1450)

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have received the recommendations of the committee of this House and of the Liberal caucus group. We have made significant improvements—especially the 14 best weeks.

In New Brunswick, in fact, workers and employers celebrated this decision by the government.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. Perhaps the members discussing at the other end of the House could continue their discussions in the lobby. They would be better doing it there, and it would be much easier for those of us here who want to take part in question period.

The hon. member for Port Moody—Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam has the floor, and everyone would like to hear him.

* * *

[English]

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians know that the Prime Minister is not believable in cleaning up government. The Prime Minister knows that the transport minister arranged meetings among members of Parliament and his friend François Duffar of Cossette Communication in violation of Canada's lobbying laws because he did not register as a lobbyist.

How can Canadians believe that the Prime Minister is serious about cleaning up corruption when he does not even hold his own ministers accountable for violating our laws?

[Translation]

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can repeat, for the benefit of the hon. member, that I never billed anything for any meeting. Therefore, the answer is clear.

[English]

Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians know that the Prime Minister is not believable in cleaning up government. When Jean Chrétien's defence minister, Art Eggleton, was caught giving an untendered contract to his girlfriend/researcher, Jean Chrétien threw him out of cabinet. What did this Prime Minister do when he was sworn in as Prime Minister? He awarded him a Senate seat as a reward for being a good Liberal.

How are Canadians supposed to believe that this Prime Minister is serious about cleaning up corruption when he rewards Art Eggleton with a Senate seat rather than doing the appropriate thing, which is saying that behaviour is not tolerable in this country?

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this Prime Minister has done more to clean up Parliament and clean up government than any prime minister in the last 30 or 40 years.

I want to say that if the Conservatives have a complaint about the hon. Minister of Transport, we have, thanks to this Prime Minister, established an independent registrar of lobbyists who reports to

Parliament. They should complain to the registrar of lobbyists and deal with this in the proper way.

* * *

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if that is a clean government, I would hate to see what a dirty one looks like.

[Translation]

The Prime Minister has a problem with the truth.

[English]

The Speaker: Order. I am sure the member for Calgary Southeast appreciates the assistance with his question, but he will want to get on with it on his own.

[Translation]

Mr. Jason Kenney: The Prime Minister himself has a problem with the truth. When he appeared before the Gomery commission, he denied his relationship with Mr. and Mrs. Claude Boulay of Groupaction. The truth is that the Prime Minister has had a close and personal relationship with the Boulays for at least 15 years.

Why should Canadians believe the Prime Minister when he says he will clean up his party from any corruption, if he cannot even tell the truth about his relationship with—

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

[English]

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that the member for Calgary Southeast has a problem with the truth because last night he said that somehow Chuck Guité represented the truth, that Chuck Guité represented some sort of smoking gun. In fact, he was blowing smoke because a few months ago he said this about Chuck Guité, "The only person who believes Chuck Guité is Chuck Guité. Chuck Guité's testimony is not credible". What a difference a few months make.

●(1455)

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, was that not special, a lecture on credibility from the minister who, every day, tells us not to comment on daily testimony and is now commenting on daily testimony.

I have a very simple question for the Prime Minister. Why does the Prime Minister expect Canadians to believe him when he promises to clean up Liberal corruption when he himself denied his close, personal, 20 year relationship with Claude Boulay of Groupaction? How can we believe him on anything he says when he did not tell the truth about that relationship with one of the principal ad scammers?

The Speaker: The hon. member for Calgary Southeast is skating on very thin ice when he says that members are not telling the truth. I hope that he will be more careful in his choice of language. The hon. Minister of Public Works and Government Services has the floor.

Oral Questions

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, why should Canadians believe anything that hon. member says when last night he said Canadians should believe Chuck Guité, but a few months ago he said that the only person who believes Chuck Guité is Chuck Guité, and Chuck Guité's testimony is not credible.

Further to that, the member for Edmonton—St. Albert said that Chuck Guité's whole testimony has no credibility just a few months ago. In fact the Leader of the Opposition said about Chuck Guité's testimony, "Most of what I heard had no credibility". In fact, the justice critic called Mr. Guité's testimony nonsense. The deputy leader, the member for Central Nova, said Chuck Guité is not forthright. That is what they said a few months ago.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Guay (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the member for Honoré-Mercier worked as president of the Liberal Party and as a very active organizer during the 2000 election campaign, including when his salary was paid by the Gervais Gagnon agency. On the one hand, Gervais Gagnon was paying on behalf of the Liberal Party, while on the other hand, the agency was collecting contracts from the government and crown corporations through the current member for Honoré-Mercier.

Is this not dirty Liberal money?

[*English*]

The Speaker: I did not hear a question relating to ministerial responsibility.

[*Translation*]

The questions must deal with the administration of the government.

Perhaps the hon. member for Rivière-du-Nord could ask a different question.

Ms. Monique Guay (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I think this issue very much relates to the government.

Another case was mentioned at the Gomery commission. It appears that the deputy government whip and member for Beauséjour intervened regarding two or three sponsorship projects in the riding that he had his eyes on.

How can the Prime Minister justify appointing the member for Beauséjour, when we are hearing that he too was immersed in the sponsorship scandal and in dirty Liberal money?

[*English*]

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for Beauséjour is an outstanding member of Parliament.

These are allegations; these are not facts. The fact is that the hon. member was working in the Prime Minister's office in the past, but was a private citizen for a whole year and a half before the sponsorship program actually began.

This is just more hearsay from the Gomery commission. It is another reason why we are better off to wait for Justice Gomery's report and analysis, rather than commenting on daily testimony and

dragging the reputation of members of the House through the mud for no reason.

* * *

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Prime Minister defended the disgraceful remarks of his immigration minister. The Catholic Civil Rights League issued a statement condemning the minister, saying:

These allegations are remarkable for their insensitivity...We think it's a new low in debate when senior ministers of the Crown can casually suggest that people who don't agree with them are Klansmen.

Why does the Prime Minister continue to defend the minister? Why will he not fire him?

• (1500)

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as someone who throughout all of his life has been dealing with ethnic stereotyping and slurring, I have become very familiar with this issue and I thank the hon. member for raising the issue in the House.

I want him to understand what we are doing in immigration. For example, when I moved quickly to reunite families with unstatus spouses, members opposite were silent. When I moved to reunite Vietnamese families with those displaced in the Philippines, they said "pooh-pooh". When I moved to eliminate the backlog in citizenship, they said "We do not want any of that". What do they want in immigration?

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, CPC): Mr. Speaker, maybe the minister needs to learn something about ministerial accountability because he has just let everyone down with his comments. The Prime Minister may be the only person left in Canada who thinks that these outrageous comments are acceptable by his cabinet ministers.

B'nai Brith has condemned the minister's comments as what they are, attempts to "inflare racial tensions in Canada".

If the Prime Minister is serious about raising the level of civility in the House, will he put an immediate end to the career of this immigration minister and fire him for trivializing the language of racism?

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have an exhibition of the typical Conservative tactic of slurring, slandering and smearing, but we are accustomed to that.

I gave an indication of our immigration program. I said that what I would do is I would increase the number of parents and grandparents who would be reunited with their family and they said, "no, we don't want old people, at least not yours".

I said that I would increase the regionalization of immigration by using students to academic institutions and they said, "no, there's no room for them because there's no room for our kids".

With them there is no room for—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor.

*Tributes***FISHERIES AND OCEANS**

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, like all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, I am deeply concerned about the impact of foreign fleets off our shores, and they are doing it illegally. I also share the belief that the time for simply talking about it is over and the time for action is now.

My question is for the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans. Could he please tell the House what Newfoundlanders can expect coming out of the International Fisheries Governance Conference going on right now in St. John's?

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I had the pleasure to attend the early part of that conference. The Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and this government are committed to ending the pillage of fish stocks on the Grand Banks and around the world. This conference is just one event in an overall strategy.

In the closing ministerial declaration, the minister agreed to strengthen the monitoring supervision regimes, to improve the dispute settlement mechanisms and to deal with countries that opt out of these agreements. The minister has also committed to making it easier to apprehend offenders and to punish them appropriately.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of Mrs. Rajinder Kaur Bhattal, Deputy Chief Minister, Punjab and Minister of Higher Education, Medical Education and Technical Education.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would be very interested in hearing, not only from the government House leader as to the agenda that he has planned for the remainder of this week and on into the next week, but specifically when he intends to give any of the opposition members an opposition supply day; when he intends to bring in his budget, not just to bring it in and debate it ad nauseam, but to actually have the courage to put it to a vote to check on the confidence of the House; and, if he intends to call an election, if he could enlighten us as to when he intends to do that.

Hon. Tony Valeri (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for the rest of today, tomorrow and early next week the order of business will be the consideration of the Senate amendments to Bill C-12, the quarantine legislation; followed by third readings of Bill C-9 respecting economic development in Quebec; Bill C-23, the human resources bill; Bill C-22, the social development bill; and Bill C-26, the border services bill.

We would then consider second reading of Bill C-45, the veterans bill; and then Bill S-18, the census bill.

Tomorrow the government will introduce a companion bill to the budget implementation bill. We hope to debate second reading of this bill by Tuesday or Wednesday of next week.

We will then also resume consideration of Bill C-43 which is the budget implementation bill.

To assist members in their planning as well, I wish to inform the House that on the evening of May 18 the House will go into a committee of the whole on the citizenship and immigration estimates, and on the evening of May 31 on the social development estimates.

My hon. colleague across the way asked about opposition days. As the rules provide and call for, six opposition days are required before the end of June. Certainly our focus will be on moving the budget implementation bill forward. I would expect that we would do that.

As far as courage, I am not sure I see very much along the way certainly across the floor when in fact we have people on this side of the House who are prepared on behalf of Canadians to ensure that this Parliament works, but I see no evidence of that from my hon. colleagues across the way.

* * *

● (1505)

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, you indicated to me during question period that some words I used were unparliamentary and therefore using your counsel I would like to withdraw those words.

* * *

MEMBER FOR OTTAWA CENTRE

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Lucille Broadbent. Her husband's decency, intellect and humanity are well-known, but it is Lucille to whom we should pay tribute: for her generosity of spirit, and common conviction; for sharing the member for Oshawa and now the member for Ottawa Centre with us. Canada would be a worse place without her generosity.

Ordinary Canadians would have been without a tireless voice to make their life better. Children in poverty would have been without a tireless champion. Far fewer people would have been exposed to another speech about the glory of Scandinavian social democracy. All this, were it not for Lucille's choice to share her husband's life with every Canadian and millions more around the world.

And so, as our friend and dear colleague makes his choice to share more of himself with her rather than with us, our party, this House, and all Canadians should say thanks to Lucille for her part in our tireless work to build a better society.

[*Translation*]

Throughout his illustrious and worthy career, the member for Ottawa Centre spent time with foreign leaders, human rights advocates and leaders in this House and across the country. It is appropriate for party leaders to rise today to show respect for his ideals and his unwavering commitment to defend them.

*Tributes**[English]*

However to understand and appreciate the magic New Democrats have always seen in him, people should see him in a union hall in Oshawa, with parents of children facing poverty and, most of all, dancing around the floor with a grin on his face and a twinkle in his eye for the extraordinary person who fuelled his passion for ordinary people: Lucille.

In a society that he always wanted to share and care more, the sharing we should salute today is that which Lucille has done, because without it, this country never could have come to love Ed, and without it, our political discourse would be the worse for it.

On behalf of a caucus his presence made wiser, a party eternally in his debt, and personally from a leader humbled by his support, I want to say that his choice is the right one. And so it is Lucille Broadbent, sister, friend, unsung heroine, to whom I pay tribute.

To her I say thanks with our fondest wishes for many more dances and music with the love of her life.

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first elected in 1968 as the member for Oshawa, chosen leader of his party in 1975, the hon. member retired midway through the 1988 mandate.

He returned to this House in the year 2004, not as leader of his party, but those in this chamber and Canadians right across the land nevertheless recognize him for what he is and that is a leader in every sense of the word. He is a man of devotion and dedication, a champion of social justice and a distinguished parliamentarian.

Members of Parliament should be role models. The member for Ottawa Centre is a role model.

● (1510)

[Translation]

To work well, our system of government requires participation by people with integrity and the courage of their convictions. Parliament would be nothing without men and women of character and principle, with a common outlook, members like the hon. member for Ottawa Centre.

The hon. member may have left Parliament for a time, but he never abandoned the causes he defended with such eloquence and zeal throughout his most remarkable public career.

[English]

During his many years in Parliament as a member, as the leader of the New Democrats, and now, during what has been a critically acclaimed sequel, he has demonstrated time and time again his commitment to the NDP as an institution and as an advocate of social reform.

The New Democratic Party has been blessed to have him. The same is true of Canada.

[Translation]

On behalf of the government and the Liberal members, I offer my best wishes to the hon. member and wishes for better health to his wife, Lucille.

[English]

Let me join the leader of the NDP in paying tribute to Lucille. The member for Ottawa Centre is leaving because of her ill health. We wish her the very best because we know that she too, throughout his lengthy career, has given Canada an enormous amount.

There are few ways to contribute to the country as important as that of a parliamentarian, not as party leader, not as a minister and not as prime minister, but as a parliamentarian, a man or a woman of this House, for it is here that conviction and conscience come through.

There is no way to dissemble in this House. We are what we are. It is in this chamber that the great debates of the nation should take place, as he has reminded me, sometimes indelicately. It is here that the best of democracy should be seen.

This has not always been the case in this House, but it has been over the last decades, and I have spent a lot of time in that gallery or in this House. When the great debates of the nation took place, when his first election took place, when the debates the historians will write about and the students will read about, the debates that make all of us in this room feel very proud for the vocation we have chosen took place, inevitably the member for Oshawa and now Ottawa Centre was there.

On behalf of the people of Canada I would like to extend our greatest appreciation for a principled and passionate career, devoted to serving Canadians and making this a better and more just country.

At the beginning of my political career I had an opportunity for a very brief period of time to share this Parliament with the member for Ottawa Centre. I must say that I feel very privileged to have had this opportunity once again.

● (1515)

Mr. John Reynolds (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a great day. When we pay tribute to a member, with all the rancour that takes place around here, on days like today we all say nice things about each other. Either on the first day one is elected a leader or on the last day one leaves it seems that is when that happens.

It is with some sadness but immense respect that we join today in paying tribute to one of our most respected colleagues.

The member for Ottawa Centre has graced this House with his presence during two eras. He has earned the respect and affection of all members on all sides of the House.

I will not say he is old, but I will say he was elected several years before I first came to this House in 1972. I have enjoyed the years getting to know him as a great Canadian and a representative of his party.

He made history and he did it while he was leader of the NDP. It was under his leadership that the NDP had 43 members in this chamber following the 1988 election, the largest number ever elected. I think I can say, in a bit of a partisan way, that he can retire secure in the knowledge that his record will never be broken, at least not in the next election.

Tributes

A former colleague, Doug Fisher, once said that we could learn who the people of Ottawa and members of Parliament liked and respected by watching the public galleries and checking attendance in this chamber. Back when people followed debates closely, before television was here, the galleries would fill, as would the seats of this chamber, when word went out that certain parliamentarians were scheduled to speak. I remember it was like that in 1972 when I arrived here. When someone like the member for Ottawa Centre would get up to speak, one always wanted to be in the House to listen, just like John Diefenbaker and other great Canadians, former prime ministers on the Liberal side too, to whom I would even come to listen.

The member for Ottawa Centre is that sort of an individual. He commands the respect of all members from all parties and enjoys attention when he rises to speak.

The hon. member has another quality we respect in members of Parliament. He can participate in fierce and partisan debates, but the rancour that one might find on this side of the curtain vanishes when we meet on the other side. That is a mark of a true and honourable parliamentarian.

Just two Sundays ago, we were at the CTV studios doing *Question Period*. It was an enjoyable encounter. Quite frankly, we exchanged opinions on the big issues facing Canadians today and we were surprised to learn that we were in full and total agreement. One would think that a Conservative and a socialist could not agree on anything, but that simply is not true. We were absolutely in total agreement that the Liberals had to be replaced. And since we both have residences in Ottawa Centre, we agreed his seat, when he leaves it, must never return to that side of the House. I said that before the hon. member graced this House with his presence.

We should also mention, and it has been mentioned very gracefully by his leader and the Prime Minister, his beloved wife, Lucille, who has graced his life and made it a better one.

On behalf of the Conservative Party of Canada, and indeed all Canadians, I want to wish the hon. member and his charming wife, Lucille, all the best in the years to come. We are indeed speaking from the heart when we call him an hon. friend.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased today to pay tribute to the member for Ottawa Centre, a man who maintained absolute integrity throughout his entire career. Integrity is a fundamental quality in public life.

My hon. colleague is also remarkable for his concern for the average citizen, the people we represent here in the House of Commons. We know, for instance, that he is against the type of globalization that has negative impacts on social standards and the environment.

My colleague came back to politics to fight against social inequalities and has fought relentlessly to get governments to correct this situation.

This man is exemplary in many ways, in his integrity, his grassroots approach and his staunch defence of social justice.

Although he is leaving us, the progressive member for Ottawa Centre will, in a way, remain with us. His great progressive spirit and the universal values he defended throughout his career are appreciated in Quebec, in Canada and in the world. We must continue to be guided by that spirit.

I will conclude by saying that the hon. member for Ottawa Centre should be an inspiration to all Canadians. To all those who believe, wrongly, that the world of politics is reflected by what we have been watching and hearing at the Gomery commission over the past few months, I say look at this politician who has served ordinary people since 1968. He exemplifies the best that politics has to offer.

On behalf of Bloc Québécois members, of Quebecers, and of the human family at large, I say to him thank you. I wish good luck to his wife, Lucille. To the member for Ottawa Centre, thanks for everything.

• (1520)

[*English*]

Hon. Ed Broadbent (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by recognizing my leader of the New Democratic Party, the Prime Minister, the former House leader and spokesperson for the Conservative Party and the chef du Bloc Québécois, and say thank you very much for the kind and generous words.

I must be candid here today and say the words were generous, they were kind and some of them were even accurate. If it could have been the case, my father would love to have been here to listen to those words. If my mother could have been here, she would have actually believed them.

As has already been said, normally the only occasion when we hear such words is when someone is starting here or leaving. I left once before, and I have not quite decided what will happen after hearing all these kind comments. I should threaten, I suppose that is the appropriate word, the leaders and spokespersons for the other parties. I was making careful notes about what they had to say about me. I have written them down and one of my caucus colleagues, who knows how to use these electronic gadgets, has sent them off to a printer. I am assured they could be on a leaflet in no time. I am the only member of the House of Commons who can canvass on the way home from this place. I understand it is even technically possible for me to have these leaflets available at 5 o'clock. So be warned.

I do not expect to come back. I do appreciate what has been said. To pick up on what the Prime Minister said, it has been an immense pleasure for me to have shared the life experience that goes on in this institution. As he pointed out, not as Prime Minister or as party leader but as an ordinary member of this institution, the lifeblood of a democracy is the elected body.

I have been here for the great debates of my time; on the Constitution; on the national energy program; on the War Measures Act; on the recognition of Japanese Canadians, their place in history and our unpleasant, to put it euphemistically, treatment of them historically. Many debates went to the root of what this country is all about.

Speaker's Ruling

I have had the great honour of being in this place first, because of the men and women in the city of Oshawa, my hometown, who elected me to be here to take part in those debates. More recent, the men and women of Ottawa Centre have honoured me with the same kind of decision.

It is a great pleasure to take part in such debates. At their best, they are vigorous because it is not just theory. For those who know me, theory is very important to me. Debates are theory translated into action. They are our values and some of them differ but they are always in the context of democracy. They get laid out on the table about the kind of society we want. The debates have been vigorous and enjoyable, and I have been honoured to be a participant in them.

If members will excuse me, I want to say in this context that I was asked not long ago if during my absence Parliament had changed somewhat, with all the lapses that come with increasing age about accurate memory and the inevitable propensity to romanticize the past.

When I was elected here Pierre Elliott Trudeau was Prime Minister of Canada and Bob Stanfield was the leader of the Conservative Party. I am not going to try to sort out the reasons for today, but it is my impression, having been here since the last election, that the tone and substance of debates have in fact changed, as has question period.

• (1525)

I will not attempt any kind of causal analysis of this, but the structure of our Parliament, depending upon our seating, tempts us into thinking all virtue, wisdom and truth lies on the side one happens to be on and all its opposite qualities happen to be on the other. This does contribute in some way to this kind of institutionalized conflict and causes us to forget many times.

[*Translation*]

I said in the past that, historically, Quebec is the heart of Canada. I am convinced that Bloc Québécois members, my dear colleagues from la belle province, agree with me that, for 75% of the issues, we are on the same side.

[*English*]

We share as members of the House; for 75% of the issues, we are on the same side or we would not be living in a liberal democracy. So often, because of the structure of this institution and particularly question period, we forget that. We tend to think that the 25% of issues that divide us, and seriously and appropriately divide us, are only what matters. What is more important in many ways as a civilized, democratic, decent country is the 75% of things we have in common.

It is a terrible thing to be both a politician and an academic, two terrible professions for wanting to give advice to others. I conclude with this thought. Those who will remain after the next election, whenever it may be, should give some serious thought to the decline in civility in the debate that has occurred in the House of Commons and which occurs daily in question period. If I were a teacher, I would not want to bring high school students into question period any longer.

There is a difference between personal remarks based on animosity and vigorous debate reflecting big differences of judgment. They should see what can be done in the future to restore to our politics in this nation a civilized tone of debate. A tone of debate, in the words of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, acknowledges the human decency and dignity of all other members of the House who recognize this. However we may differ, we are all human and we all have the right to have our inner dignity respected, especially in debate in the House.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

* * *

• (1530)

POINTS OF ORDER

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the point of order raised on May 2 by the hon. Leader of the Government in the House of Commons regarding the admissibility of the amendment to the motion to concur in the third report of the Standing Committee on Finance.

[*Translation*]

I would like to thank the hon. minister for raising this matter and the hon. House leader of the official opposition, the hon. House leader for the Bloc Québécois, the hon. members for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell and Calgary Southeast for their contributions to the discussion.

[*English*]

Let me begin by giving the background to this question. On April 22, the hon. House leader of the official opposition moved a motion to concur in the third report of the Standing Committee on Finance. This report deals with the prebudget consultations of the finance committee under the provisions of Standing Order 83.1.

During debate on the concurrence motion, the hon. leader of the official opposition moved the following amendment:

That the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word "that" and substituting the following:

The 3rd report of the Standing Committee on Finance, presented on December 20, 2004, be not now concurred in,

But that it be recommitted to the Standing Committee on Finance with instruction that it amend the same so as to recommend that the government resign over refusing to accept some of the committee's key recommendations and to implement the budgetary changes that Canadians need.

The Deputy Speaker found the amendment to be in order and proposed the question, so debate continued on the amendment. The hon. government House leader in presenting his point of order laid out very well the process for dealing with amendments to motions to concur in committee reports. As the minister correctly noted, our practice has been to allow the House to give a permissive or mandatory instruction to a committee to amend the text of a report.

The hon. government House leader went on to raise three main objections.

Speaker's Ruling

First, he expressed concern that the amendment went beyond the mandate of the finance committee as set down in Standing Order 83.1. He argued that the finance committee's authority to report on the budgetary policy of the government pursuant to Standing Order 83.1 is tied directly to the government's budgetary cycle and that its mandate lapses once the government presents its budget.

This point was also stressed by the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell. The minister stated that the amendment is beyond the timetable established in the Standing Order, in effect extending the committee's order of reference for this report. He concluded that, at a minimum, the amendment should have stated, "Notwithstanding Standing Order 83.1".

Second, the minister argued that the amendment is out of order in that it is putting a question to the House that has already been decided. He noted that there had been two days of debate on the content of the third report of the finance committee presented December 20, 2004, and that no motion to concur in the report had been proposed prior to the budget presentation on February 23.

Stressing that the budget had been adopted on March 9, he asserted that the amendment to the concurrence motion instructs the finance committee to condemn the government for not accepting its recommendations respecting its budgetary policy, when in fact the House has already approved the government's budgetary policy. He argued that the amendment in effect asks the House to decide the same question twice.

As his third objection, the minister raised concerns that the changes to the Standing Orders relating to concurrence in committee reports were not designed "to allow ancillary issues to be voted on through amendments".

In speaking to the matter, the hon. opposition House leader noted that the amendment had been ruled admissible by the Deputy Speaker on April 22 and that the motion and the amendment had been debated for one hour and 19 minutes. The hon. opposition House leader rejected the notion that the finance committee's mandate had lapsed and claimed that the motion of instruction was indeed admissible as it relates to the committee's order of reference.

• (1535)

[*Translation*]

The hon. House leader for the Bloc Québécois supported the arguments put by the hon. opposition House leader. He also asserted that this report was no different than any other committee report, contrary to what the hon. government House leader had argued. He further reminded the House that, notwithstanding the March 9 vote approving the budgetary policy of the government in general and given recent events, the budget appeared to be a work in progress. He concluded that asking the committee to reconsider the report was therefore admissible.

[*English*]

The member for Calgary Southeast further elaborated on the procedures for concurrence in committee reports.

As members are well aware, the procedures surrounding motions to concur in committee reports have generated a great deal of attention in these past few weeks. I have considered carefully all the

arguments presented and I am now prepared to deal with the various points that were raised.

The hon. government House leader questioned whether the Standing Committee on Finance's order of reference pursuant to Standing Order 83.1 extended beyond the presentation of any report or reports concerning the budgetary policy of the government.

Standing Order 83.1 reads as follows:

Commencing on the first sitting day in September of each year, the Standing Committee on Finance shall be authorized to consider and make reports upon proposals regarding the budgetary policy of the government. Any report or reports thereon may be made no later than the tenth sitting day before the last normal sitting day in December, as set forth in Standing Order 28(2).

[*Translation*]

While the standing order sets down the timeframe for presenting a report on the budgetary policy of the government, it is silent as to whether or when a motion to concur in such a report can be moved.

Standing Order 66(2) provides the mechanism for concurring in committee reports. This standing order does not prohibit the moving of concurrence in reports presented pursuant to Standing Order 83.1 nor does it stipulate a timeframe during which such concurrence can be moved.

[*English*]

While a review of our precedents reveals that our usual practice has been to consider the content of prebudget consultation results via take note debates, in 2001 the House did debate concurrence in such a report.

On November 1 and 7 of that year, the House debated the government motion "That this House take note of ongoing pre-budget consultations". On November 26, the Standing Committee on Finance presented its 10th report (Pre-Budget Consultations). On December 10, the budget speech was delivered; it was debated on December 11 and 12.

On December 13, concurrence was moved in the 10th report of the finance committee and debated that day. Then, under our old procedure, the motion was transferred to government orders. The budget was debated again on January 28 and on January 29, 2002, when it was adopted.

This example differs from the current situation in that the motion was debated before the budget was actually adopted. However, I cite the example only to point out that, at the time, no objections were raised as to the acceptability of moving a motion to concur in the committee's report made under Standing Order 83.1, as some are arguing in the current situation.

As to the minister's concern that the report could not be referred back to the finance committee because its mandate specifically pursuant to Standing Order 83.1 had expired, I would suggest that, unlike a special committee, which would have to be reconstituted in order to reconsider its final report, the Standing Committee on Finance continues in existence and can receive an instruction from the House to reconsider any of its reports. Therefore, I do not agree with the argument that the amendment had to include the words "Notwithstanding Standing Order 83.1".

The second issue that the hon. government House leader raised was the matter of deciding a question twice. He was concerned that since the budgetary policy had already been debated and adopted, there was no need to concur in a committee report which essentially deals also with the budgetary policy.

The hon. House leader for the Bloc Québécois has reminded the House of recent developments which point to continuing discussion on the substance of the budget. My own interpretation of the proceedings that have taken place to date in this regard must remain purely procedural. Seen from that perspective, it seems to me that the House has been asked to consider three separate questions.

First, there was a take note debate on January 31 and February 1 of this year. The motion before the House at that time was, "That this House take note of the third report of the Standing Committee on Finance". As members will recall, no decision was taken on the motion.

[Translation]

Second, there was the budget debate, which occurred on February 24, and March 7, 8 and 9. The motion before the House on those days was, "That this House approve in general the budgetary policy of the government".

• (1540)

[English]

Third, debate on the motion, "That the third report of the Standing Committee on Finance, presented on Monday, December 20, 2004, be concurred in", began on April 22.

As I see it, the House has been asked to take a decision on three different questions: a motion to take note of a report; a motion to approve the budgetary policy of the government; and a motion to concur in a report. These are three different motions with three different outcomes. Therefore, I cannot agree with the hon. government House leader that the House is deciding the same question twice.

The final issue raised by the minister has to do with the nature or intent of the amendment. He argued that the provisional Standing Order relating to concurrence in committee reports was not designed "to allow ancillary issues to be voted on through amendments".

Standing Order 66 merely provides a mechanism by which the House can take a decision on motions to concur in committee reports and by extension any amendment moved thereto. In his presentation, the minister acknowledged that an amendment to refer a report back to a committee with an instruction is in order. The Chair can find no procedural grounds on which the amendment can be found defective.

Indeed, in reviewing the precedent from June 22, 1926, which was referred to by the official opposition House leader and the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, and which can be found in the *Journals* at pages 461 and 462 for 1926, an amendment containing assertions clearly damaging to the government of the day was successfully moved to a motion for concurrence in the report of a special committee. I find this example to be not markedly different from the one the House is faced with now.

Government Orders

It is not up to the Speaker to judge the substance of any motion; rather, the Chair must determine whether our procedures have been respected in the presentation of a motion to the House. If the Chair rules an amendment to be in order, then the fate of the amendment and the motion to concur in the report is in the hands of the House.

After considering the arguments presented in this case, I must agree with the Deputy Speaker and rule that the amendment is in order.

Again, I wish to thank the hon. government House leader for bringing this matter to the attention of the House.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

QUARANTINE ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion in relation to the amendments made by the Senate to Bill C-12, an act to prevent the introduction and spread of communicable diseases.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the NDP will be supporting Bill C-12, but I need to emphasize the fact that there are some issues which continue to need to be addressed. Whether they are addressed through the mechanism of this bill or through other mechanisms, I think it is important that we are on record.

A great deal of information has been left up to the minister to develop through regulations. As recent experience has shown with the Chrétien bill for Africa, which was Bill C-9 in the last Parliament, developing regulations can be an incredibly slow and tedious process. We cannot wait indefinitely for these kinds of regulations to be developed.

There is one area of concern in the report that came back to the House. It specifically indicates that the proposed regulations or any version of the amended regulations should come to both the House and the Senate. We are concerned that it will delay the process if regulations must be approved by both the House and the Senate. We would urge expediency in looking at this, because we are often dealing with issues that are in the nature of a crisis when we are talking about quarantine.

I have addressed this issue before, but I feel compelled to raise it again: the use of screening officers is a major concern. It appears that we will be forcing customs officers to take on another role, that of medical professional. This is on top of their already substantial duties, which include enforcing the Customs Act, looking for potential terrorists and stopping materials that could harm our flora and fauna. This is far too much to expect one group to enforce. We must take that into consideration when we are asking our customs officers to take on these duties.

Other organizations, including the Canadian Nurses Association, have pointed out some concerns. They have pointed out that emerging diseases often have unique symptoms. Screening officers will have to be continually trained and supported to ensure that they know what they have to watch out for. A bad cough is not only the sign of a potential epidemic; it can be the sign of some other things. They must be able to determine what the differences are.

Bill C-12 does not explain how this system will be supported over time. We must address this in order to protect the health and welfare of Canadians.

One of the lessons learned from the SARS epidemic was about the lack of coordination and official communication responsibilities during the crisis. Again, the Canadian Nurses Association recommends that the Chief Public Health Officer and the Public Health Agency of Canada have a critical role in any epidemic or suspected epidemic. They were not included in this bill because enabling legislation to create that position and organization is still being written. This is a serious oversight. We urge the government to act quickly on that legislation. Everyone who spoke to the committee emphasized how important it is to have one clear authority during a health emergency.

It is our hope, however, that we never need this bill, but if we do, we must make sure that the sweeping powers given to the minister to detain people, to use privately owned facilities and to force people to accept medical assessment or treatment, are not unchecked. There are not enough assurances in this legislation that the minister will act in a reasonable manner and that people's rights to privacy will be respected or that workers affected by the quarantine will actually be protected. My colleague from the Bloc spoke quite a bit about this.

Some of these areas of concern are going to be dealt with by regulation. We have already indicated how important it is that the government act quickly in this area.

There is one other area for which we know this government will soon bring forward legislation, especially around protecting workers, and that is a quick response during a health emergency to such issues as employment insurance claims, medical leave and health and safety standards for front line workers. It is absolutely critical, if we are asking front line workers to put their lives on the line for things like this, that we ensure there is a social safety net to protect them.

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

I also want to briefly mention the Canadian Medical Association "SARS in Canada" report. A couple of key issues the association brought forward are not specifically dealt with adequately in this bill. They include communications.

• (1545)

As we saw during the SARS crisis, and I will quote from the report:

Without a coordinated system to notify acute care facilities and health care providers of global health alerts, front line clinicians often have no prior warning of new emerging diseases.

One of the things that became apparent during the SARS crisis was the lack of a list of current fax numbers or phone numbers of family doctors. There was an inability to communicate with physicians in real time. We must ensure that a communication system is developed to allow us to deal with emerging crises. Many crises emerge very quickly and an early response time is absolutely essential.

One of the other issues that was raised by the Canadian Medical Association was the fact that there was no system. Again I will quote from the report:

There was a lack of a system to distribute protective gear to health care professionals in the province. Once this became apparent the OMA [Ontario Medical Association] identified suppliers and manufacturers and offered to undertake distribution of masks to physicians in order to protect them and their patients.

It is absolutely essential when a crisis emerges that we have lists of suppliers and that we have communication systems in place so that we can adequately protect not only our front line workers, but also the Canadian population as a whole.

Although we will be supporting Bill C-12, I would urge that we quickly address some of these glaring omissions and gaps in the legislation.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

FOOD AND DRUGS ACT

(Bill C-282. On the Order: Private Members' Bills)

Second reading and reference to the Standing Committee on Health of Bill C-282, an act to amend the Food and Drugs Act (export permits)

Mr. Wajid Khan (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. There have been consultations among all parties, and if you seek it I believe you will find unanimous consent that the order for the second reading and reference to the Standing Committee on Health of Bill C-282, an act to amend the Food and Drugs Act (export permits), standing in my name on the order of precedence on the order paper, be discharged and the bill be withdrawn.

• (1550)

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Government Orders

(Order discharged and bill withdrawn)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

QUARANTINE ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion relating to amendments made by the Senate to Bill C-12, an act to prevent the introduction and spread of communicable diseases.

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Madam Speaker, even though I do not have the witty eloquence of the hon. member for Hochelaga, who discussed this issue earlier, or the clarity of the hon. member for Verchères—Les Patriotes, or the poetic skills of the hon. member for Saint-Lambert, I am very pleased to rise in this House to address Bill C-12 once again.

It was a few months ago that we conducted the clause by clause review of Bill C-12. The Standing Committee on Health worked very diligently on this legislation. Indeed, it is important for Canadians and Quebeckers to have an act that is very effective in containing the dangers of communicable diseases, particularly in this age of supersonic jets, as the member for Hochelaga so aptly pointed out. People travel from country to country much more rapidly than in the past.

A few days ago, white powder spilled from a suspicious parcel found at Montreal's airport. Those who had been in contact with that parcel became sick and had to be taken to hospital. About 20 people were affected. We are not exempt from biological terrorism. Therefore, we have to be very careful and ensure that we have good legislation to deal with these problems.

Not long ago, I had the pleasure of going to South Africa with you, Madam Speaker, in order to attend the third session of the Pan-African Parliament, which is made up of 46 of the 53 countries on the African continent. Before that trip, I had no idea of what danger some people face. When we are safe at home, we do not realize the grinding poverty of certain countries and the huge shortage of drugs to combat certain diseases.

Recently, the Canada-Africa Parliamentary Association discussed HIV-AIDS. Efforts are being made to halt the spread of this disease, but it is still far from being eradicated.

Sometimes we have an opportunity to see such situations first hand. You know that, Madam Speaker, because we both visited an orphanage in Bedoni, where one extraordinary woman cares for 105 children aged 2 to 16, whose parents had AIDS, and who are HIV positive themselves or have other problems. We saw the living conditions there, which were very rudimentary and difficult. Up to 18 children shared a small room chockablock with beds, measuring 7 by 10 feet. This woman and her few helpers look after all those children. We could feel the love and joy that surrounded them despite the circumstances.

When we are dealing with a bill that relates to the problem of transmitting disease, we also need to think of the human beings who

will be protected by it. That is what I learned from my experience, to always think of the human beings.

My colleague from Nanaimo—Cowichan has dealt very well with several of the points of concern to us in connection with this bill. I hope that the regulations will also address them.

When people travel, they have to have a number of vaccines. Before we went to South Africa, we had to have a whole series of immunizations. When we leave here, we can be pretty well sure that we will come back healthy. But if someone's journey starts out in a country where vaccines are virtually non-existent or harder to obtain, or perhaps have to be paid for, the situation becomes a bit more complicated. This is the case in the poor countries where medicine is not well developed. Even if it is, there is not always the money to deal with all the diseases that afflict the inhabitants, such as Ebola fever.

• (1555)

Recently, in one of the African countries, there has been a reemergence of a fever caused by a virus that is even stronger and more difficult to fight. In addition, with all the antibiotics we are taking even for small infections, there is no doubt that our immune systems are weakened.

It is clear that a bill like this one can pretty much ensure the continued safety of those we want to protect.

I think we have been very diligent, during the clause by clause study, in protecting ourselves against actions taken too hastily by the Minister of Health or anyone wanting to work with those capable or suspected of introducing any such disease or virus in this country.

We do not need, however, yet another procedure or the approval of another house to protect ourselves and take appropriate action, where new regulations would have to be considered and studied. There are enough adults in this place to decide whether the regulations we take are the right ones. We do not need another house for that.

Our friends the senators are also very diligent. They have no doubt done their homework. But once the bill is passed, I think that we can rely on ourselves to implement it properly. It is very important to us that, with respect to this legislation, the interested political body be this House, and not the Senate.

I hope that the hon. members of this House will think twice before approving these amendments to the bill and that they will object to having to seek the approval of the Senate again.

[*English*]

Mr. Gary Carr (Halton, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I hope the member will forgive me if I did not understand the concern properly. In listening to some of the concerns that were put forward, I may have misunderstood what the member was saying, but it seemed that a lot of the concern related to the fact that it was the Senate that was leading this particular issue.

Did I read the member wrong? Is her major concern that it is coming from the Senate?

Government Orders

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Madam Speaker, we are still confident that, while it did not fully meet our expectations, Bill C-12, as considered clause by clause by the Standing Committee on Health, can be amended through its regulations so that our needs are met.

But, as my hon. colleague indicated, the message from the Senate, asking that the bill be amended by specifying that the governor in council may only make a regulation under section 62 if the minister has caused the draft regulation to be tabled before both houses of Parliament, is simply unnecessary.

• (1600)

[English]

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Madam Speaker, I had not really intended to rise to address Bill C-12, but I have been moved to do exactly that given the events of today.

I certainly support the earlier comments of our public health critic, the hon. member for Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, and the comments she made in support of this legislation.

Having said that, given the present situation not only in the House of Commons but indeed in our country where we have a corrupt government in office that should not be in office for one day longer, I find that I simply must move the following amendment. I am pleased to have this seconded by my seatmate, the whip of the official opposition, the member for Niagara Falls. The amendment is self-explanatory.

I move that the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word “that” and substituting that a message be sent to the Senate to acquaint their honours that this House disagrees with amendment no. 2, made by the Senate, to Bill C-12, an act to prevent the introduction and spread of communicable diseases, because the passage of the amendment may be construed that this House has confidence in the Government, which is in dispute, and the adoption of this motion should confirm that it does not.

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): The Chair will take the amendment under advisement. We will continue with debate on the motion.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Deputy Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Minister responsible for Official Languages, Minister responsible for Democratic Reform and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. We had a similar type of amendment presented this morning on the motion for concurrence on a committee report. The question as to whether or not it was in order was raised. We then waited a while for the Speaker to rule. We know the Speaker ruled earlier today that the particular amendment was not in order due to relevance.

Since we are talking about Senate amendments to a bill dealing with quarantine, one might wonder about the relevance of the amendment just proposed. Essentially, the House has already stated, by adopting this bill at first, second and third reading, that indeed the bill itself was more than acceptable to the House because it approved it and sent it on to the Senate.

I would ask that the Chair seriously consider whether or not we are again facing a situation where an amendment has been presented that is not in order and I would ask that the Chair rule on it.

• (1605)

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have a couple of things for your consideration while you deliberate as to whether this amendment is in fact in order.

I want the House to take note of the fact that it is certainly in order for the House of Commons to accept or reject Senate amendments to a bill. On page 674 of Marleau and Montpetit it states:

—it is for the House itself to decide whether it accepts or rejects the amendments proposed by the Senate, and if the House so desires it may state the reasons for rejecting or amending them.

The House may want to reject the Senate amendments for a variety of reasons. In the actual amendment that I have just introduced to the chamber, it clearly states why I believe the House should reject these Senate amendments. It is contained in the body of the amendment itself.

As to the deputy House leader's assertion that because these amendments deal with a bill that had already passed through the chamber at a previous time, I would submit that events not only in the House of Commons but indeed in our country have changed dramatically since that bill proceeded through this chamber.

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, CPC): Madam Speaker, in his ruling this morning, which is what makes it entirely different from the present situation, the Speaker stated that the amendment was only to a part of the report, but it really referred to the entire report and therefore was not really relevant.

Certainly, in this case, this is not the case. The amendment that was made is very relevant as it relates to the piece of legislation, so we are not talking about apples and apples at all. We are talking about two entirely different cases.

If we look at the ruling the Speaker made earlier, given this type of amendment, the Speaker said quite clearly that this would be proper, right and acceptable.

Mr. Werner Schmidt (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to refer in particular to the reference made by the hon. deputy House leader of the government when he stated that the bill had been presented to the House, was given third reading, and was before the Senate. That is a matter of fact. We know that happened.

What is being moved here is an amendment to the amendment from the Senate. That is not the same thing as the bill. That is an amendment to the bill itself which changes the bill.

This House did not approve that bill without the amendment. It approved a bill that was presented by the government. The Senate has made some amendments to that bill which is, in effect, to change that bill. It is argued that this is not the same bill simply because the amendment itself changes the bill.

Madam Speaker, it is absolutely in order and you should rule in favour of the amendment.

Government Orders

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Niagara Falls, CPC): Madam Speaker, there are a couple of things that distinguish this amendment from the one that was dealt with this morning by the Speaker. The ruling this morning by the Speaker dealt with an amendment to a committee report. The Speaker was very specific as to the relevance of the amendment to that particular report.

This is a piece of legislation. Surely the House of Commons has the right to decide whether to reject it, accept it or call into confidence the government that ultimately sponsors that bill. That is our right. It has been our right I think for several hundred years. In our system, we have the right to reject that, reject the government that is sponsoring that, and indicate that we no longer have confidence in the group within this Parliament that is moving it. It is very different from what we dealt with this morning.

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): The Chair wants to thank all hon. members for their input, but will continue to reserve and ask that we continue with debate. I will come back to the House with a ruling.

● (1610)

Mr. Jim Abbott: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order to seek clarification. This morning my understanding was that in spite of the fact that the amendment was taken under advisement by the Speaker, that the debate was ongoing on that amendment, in spite of the fact that it had not been accepted. I need to have clarification from you, Madam Speaker, if the debate that is about to take place following my point of order is on the amendment or on the original motion.

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): For the clarification of the House, the debate is now on the main motion. The amendment is taken under advisement.

Hon. Peter Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to join in this debate on the quarantine legislation.

It really amazes me that anyone in this House would try and block quarantine legislation in this day and age. The world as we all know is getting smaller and smaller.

We have the most diverse country in the world, so we have people, on a daily basis, with actual physical links with not tens but with hundreds of countries. In the province of Ontario, for example, we have people from 211 different countries, first generation Canadians, who have relatives coming and going and they travel. They are moving all around the world.

It is quite clear, under those human circumstances, that we need quarantine regulations. The idea of trying to block that at this time is really quite extraordinary. In addition, and I do not really know the statistics, we have daily trade with scores or hundreds of countries. We have products of all sorts, plant and animal products, moving across our borders.

We are a great trading nation. Among the G-8, we are the nation which depends most on trade around the world. If we send our goods elsewhere, other people are certainly sending their goods here. If ever there was a time when we needed quarantine legislation, this is

it. And if ever there was a country which needed quarantine legislation, this is it.

I would have thought that the members of the opposition who are blocking this bill and slowing it down would have learned from the signals which we have been receiving in recent years. These are not just hints that there are problems in the area of quarantine, and of screening people and products as they come across our border. These are major signals of what is happening.

We think of SARS. In Ontario, particularly in southern Ontario, the city of Toronto was affected just like that by the SARS epidemic. It also spread out to the hospitals and nursing homes in my riding of Peterborough.

Then there is avian flu, which we escaped, but my colleagues on this side from the west coast experienced it. I went to one of the ridings out west soon after the first avian flu epidemic. Hundreds of thousands of birds were slaughtered. The effect of that was staggering not just on the economy but on the morale of the people living there.

We can all recall the hoof and mouth disease from some years ago. We were all very concerned about that. We had a hoof and mouth free environment and here was a risk of it coming into our country. We remember walking across mats in the airports with disinfectants on them. Our farms were surrounded by fences and again, we had to go over disinfected barriers to enter the farms.

Madam Speaker, I know that you have many deer in your riding. People think of hoof and mouth disease as a cattle problem, but in fact, if that had skipped into the area of wildlife in our enormous country, it could have disappeared into the bush, be gone for generations, but be there for generations, and come back into our fields and into our herds and flocks.

I have not yet touched on BSE. We talk about screening for various things, but in the case of BSE, it is a little different than some of these other diseases. Here we have a disease which comes from contaminated food. It has now closed the border for years. In my riding 1,000 farm families are affected. Cattle, sheep, a large bison herd, they are all affected by BSE.

Then all over the country, and not just in British Columbia, people talk about the beetles and bugs that have come in which are affecting our trees.

● (1615)

Our maple trees are being affected. There is nothing more symbolic of Canada, as my colleague will note, than the maple tree and it is being affected by a beetle, which could result in the destruction of all the maple trees in the country.

We have already had Dutch elm disease and there is another tree in southern Ontario that is being affected. We are cutting a swath across the province to try to prevent the spread of it.

Government Orders

I have beekeepers in my riding. Bees are not a large part of the agricultural economy in my riding, perhaps \$250,000 a year, but in counties around me the bee industry represents millions of dollars. We have to import queen bees from New Zealand and places like that because our own queen bees have been affected by some exotic disease.

I started off with quarantining for human beings and then I mentioned trade. I then mentioned some examples, which were only the more familiar examples that our colleagues here know. The fact is that the two are linked. Increasingly, it is becoming clear that there is no real difference between animal disease, human disease and plant disease. There are crossovers from them all.

We can have a diseased animal, which is the case in BSE. If we eat the meat from that diseased animal there is another disease that we can get. There are crossovers when we think of SARS. We can think of the links between mosquitoes, the dead birds which are the indicator of SARS, and the dead human beings who eventually succumbed from SARS. Think of the fear in South Korea at the present time for avian flu skipping into human beings.

In this important matter of quarantine, which the opposition has been blocking here, we are talking about a serious increasingly complex matter. It is complex in terms of what is crossing our borders, human disease wise, animal disease wise and plant wise, and it is complex in terms of the crossovers between plants, animals and human beings.

I think we need a quarantine system that truly addresses that. It does not say that this is what we do for plants, this is what we do for animals and this is what we do for those other animals which we call human beings. Somewhere in the sophisticated computer system, which is screening for these things, it tells us about a plant disease that can affect animals and a plant disease that can affect human beings. It then tells us about a human disease that can affect animals and plants. This is the sort of sophistication we should be at in this modern day and age.

Let us think now of quarantine for human beings, although it would work just as well for all animals. One of the difficulties with any quarantine system is that if we are not careful, if we wait until the animal or the human has the full blown disease, it is too late. Therefore if a person or an animal is coming through one of our airports or getting off one of our ships and they are already very diseased it is too late.

We need to develop quarantine systems that will get in front of that so that we will detect people, animals or plants, if we can because it is more difficult with plants, before the disease becomes impossible to control. There are various ways of doing that and one of them is to detect symptoms.

Let me do this from the point of view of, let us say, Peterborough county, and then we can think of it in terms of Canada as a whole. If Peterborough county had a tracking system in the hospitals, the doctors' offices, the nursing homes, the seniors' homes and the schools where they have nurses who are doing check-offs of children, it could input people's symptoms, which may include high temperatures and fever, or instances of vomiting and diarrhea.

● (1620)

As we all know, a variety of diseases have different symptoms but let us say we had tracked 10 or 20 of those symptoms. From the Palm Pilots in the schools, from the doctor's office computers, from the emergency room of the hospital, or from people checking on residents of seniors homes, if we discovered that in Peterborough county there were spikes in two or three of these twenty symptoms, this would be a signal to us that something is happening.

It would be checked and we might discover that in a particular seniors' home there might be food poisoning or it just happens there are more people with fevers than usual. However if in fact we discover that in all of those places, two or three of these symptoms are showing up at the same time, we might say that here is something that could be an epidemic, here is something which worldwide could be a pandemic, and we are catching it at the symptom stage.

That is why, in terms of a quarantine system for the airports and for the docks, among other things, as well as looking for the obvious signs of diseases, such as spots on people's faces or that kind of thing, we can scan for high temperature. We can have people watching for individuals who look as though they have a fever, take them to one side and see if we can check it. We can then input that very quickly to discover whether it is something that is nationwide, not something that is local to a family or to a particular airport.

There is one more thing about this that has human rights implications and ethical implications. It has to do with tracing human beings and animals. We know that the biggest scientific breakthrough of this century is DNA. Each of us, each plant and each animal is perfectly identifiable from DNA. Let us take the case of BSE. If an animal has BSE, from a sample of its blood that was given at birth or when the animal came over the border, we would know with absolute certainty which animal it was. When a problem occurs it can be traced right back with DNA.

One of the interesting examples of this lately is Maple Leaf Foods which is now taking DNA samples of all its hogs. What this means is that if we find something wrong with a piece of bacon it would be possible from the DNA to identify the hog from which that bacon came.

I mentioned the ethical implications and I will come back to that in a moment, but if we are going to have a quarantine system, particularly tracing human beings coming in but also animals and plants coming in, it is not just enough to say that a certain animal in a certain condition passed through the border at Windsor the other day. We have to know first of all where the animal is going, and hopefully we know that already, and then if there is something wrong with it we have to know where it is coming from so we can address the source of the actual problem.

When we think of human beings, including sick human beings, the DNA analogy applies at the same time. We have to remember the ethical aspects of that but it is extremely important to be able to trace a very sick individual to his or her original environment.

Government Orders

I would go back to what I said at the outset here. I do think it is of the greatest importance that this House, including the opposition parties, move as quickly as we can, bearing in mind the ethics that I have mentioned and the complexity I have mentioned, to deal with the management of emerging and re-emerging threats to public health.

I have been mentioning animals and plants all the time but I do not see any difference between monitoring human beings for public health reasons and monitoring animals and plants for public health reasons.

• (1625)

At every point of entry to Canada we need to invest money, technology and creativity to protect our population. It is our duty as members of the House of Commons to do that. Those border points are our first line of defence as long as we can trace the products and the people that I mentioned earlier. There are other things we can do, such as the symptoms analysis in Peterborough county that I described before, but the first line of defence is the quarantine system around this wonderful huge country.

This legislation would provide the Government of Canada with truly modern, 21st century tools to screen people and products coming across our border. It would also give the Government of Canada the capacity to respond once it had evidence that something is going on.

In the case of this bill, it is not as though we are dealing with something that someone has just dreamt up or something that has just appeared out of nowhere. The Standing Committee on Health made significant contributions to the bill and strengthened the legislation. I certainly acknowledge its efforts and commitment.

The Senate of Canada recently completed its legislative review. As a result, the Senate Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology adopted amendments pertaining to the tabling of regulations before Parliament.

Bill C-12 was passed by the Senate of Canada on condition that the proposed quarantine regulations be laid before both Houses. Constitutionally, that has to be done. This amendment reflects equal status for both chambers in parliamentary oversight of the regulation making process. Furthermore, the governor in council may only make a regulation under section 62 of Bill C-12 if both Houses concur.

From time to time I have been critical of the other place but I respect its jurisdiction and I respect the individuals who operate there. It is my hope that members of the House of Commons will find merit in the work previously undertaken by the Senate of Canada and concur with the Senate amendments to Bill C-12.

I wish to express my strong support and the government's strong support for this important piece of health protection legislation. I urge all members to give third reading to the bill in the interest of global public health and the health and safety of all Canadians.

I am delighted to have participated in this debate. I urge all members to move rapidly on this matter. It is urgent and it is something which responsible members of Parliament should do.

Mr. Gary Carr (Halton, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I know my hon. friend did not have a lot of time to prepare this excellent presentation but I am always amazed by his great wealth of wisdom.

The question I have relates to some important aspects of the bill. I agree wholeheartedly with what my hon. friend said about SARS. Like a lot of us, we were concerned that the opposition, through procedural wrangling, would try to prevent the debate on the bill from taking place.

I was particularly struck by what the member said regarding some of the diseases that we in Ontario face, particularly as it related to the SARS outbreak last year. We all remember people wearing masks during flights as a result of the scare at that point in time. As a result of some of those activities, we are now dealing with this legislation.

My question deals with protecting and compensating people who are quarantined. I wonder if the member could inform us what is going to be done regarding protecting or compensating people who are quarantined as a result of this legislation.

I want to say again how proud I am to have listened to some of my colleague's comments. As usual, he has given great insight into this issue.

• (1630)

Hon. Peter Adams: Madam Speaker, in these issues there are questions of costs involved. I tried to make the point that the quarantine system I have in mind is not something selfishly just for us. We are not just protecting ourselves from things coming into Canada, we are protecting the rest of the world from products and people going out of Canada as well.

However, where Canadian citizens are involved, the costs are covered by our wonderful public health plan. Canadian citizens are well covered for the costs of quarantine mentioned by my colleague. In the case of SARS, we had people, who eventually and thankfully were determined not to have the disease, taken off work or taken away from wherever. They were confined to their homes, a kind of house arrest. We had to make special coverage at that time. I recall special provisions were made under EI for that. However, our health system covers those issues.

For non-Canadians though, it will become a matter of travel health plans, which many of us invest in when we go overseas. We will have to recommend increasingly to people who are travelling around the globe that they consider some health insurance with respect to quarantine, unlike the case for Canadians, if they will not be covered for that type of medical intervention. I hope it would be recommended that they take out health insurance.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Social Development (Social Economy), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened with great interest in what the hon. member for Peterborough had to say. There was one area that the hon. member perhaps would like to address, and that is what happens, in our zeal to protect the public, to individual rights? Is there any question in Bill C-12? There is the question of the charter. I can give a perfect example of what happened recently in Montreal.

Government Orders

It was in the news that in Montreal a package was suspect. Immediately when the authorities came in, to protect the public, people were stripped and hosed down. Should we be concerned, with what is provided in Bill C-12, that the Charter of Rights of individuals will be protected? I am assuming this is the case after having read the bill. I am sure the hon. member will let the House know that protection does exist within Bill C-12.

•(1635)

Hon. Peter Adams: Madam Speaker, I did mention in a slightly different context than my colleague the ethical and moral implications of some of these matters. Is there not always a balance? I described the case in which people were effectively under house arrest because they were in quarantine. It is their rights, the right to go to work, as compared with the possibility of infecting other people.

First, protections are included in the legislation and it is charter friendly. As my colleague indicated, the charter is there to protect everyone. Also, appeal is available against any measures taken under this legislation. I repeat, it is a balance between the public good and the individual good, between the rights of the general public, or rights of each of us as a member of the general public, and the rights of a particular individual at a certain time.

My understanding also is that the legislation is consistent with such matters in all provincial jurisdictions so there will be no serious clash there.

This is something which I do believe has been taken into account by the committee and by the Senate as it has been developed and as we move forward with these regulations.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for that because I think it is a very important issue in the context of, as I said, examples at which we have looked. Especially during the crisis of SARS, there were questions about employees who were in quarantine.

Those employees obviously could not work. They could not have employment benefits because they were under quarantine. I am sure the hon. member would like to let the House know that there are provisions within the legislation. The Senate has taken into account in studying the legislation what happens when one is put under quarantine and his or her livelihood or employment is affected by it. Is that covered by Bill C-12?

Hon. Peter Adams: Madam Speaker, as I mentioned to the previous questioner, the sad fact is we do already have experience of these matters. SARS is perhaps the highest profile one but there have been many others.

As we should, we have learned from those. Special provision had to be made in the case of SARS for employment insurance and employment insurance benefits for people who were kept away from work. We have learned from that experience and that has been built into the legislation and the regulations. In future, instead of us having to invent this thing and give greater anxiety to people who find themselves, for example, confined to their own homes instead of going to work, this will be an automatic way of dealing with the work side of this. It is the same as through the public health system where there will be automatic ways of dealing with public health side of it.

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the question to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment is as follows: the hon. member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Natural Resources.

Mr. Gary Carr (Halton, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to enter the debate and talk about this very important quarantine bill.

I want to start by speaking about what I consider probably the most important issue facing this great country today, and that is health care. I want to couch this in the context of what this Quarantine Act means to the Canadians as it relates to health care.

I was one who pushed the government and the Prime Minister on the issue of the health care accord. When the Prime Minister was in my during the election campaign, I sat and listened to a group of cancer patients from Cancer Care Ontario who talked about some of their concerns and related some of the problems. This is one reason why I pushed it.

The Prime Minister then signed the accord, which we know provides \$41 billion over the next 10 years. Some of that money will go to help out with things like the Quarantine Act. Looking at the health care system, it is my belief we have a number of concerns. One is the quarantine situation, which is a relatively new concern. My hon. friend last time highlighted the situation of SARS. We have the avian flu situation. It is relatively new in terms of the consciousness of Canadians.

There were a lot of concerns about the waiting list times and what we would do with regard to long term waiting lists for key areas like heart surgery, knee surgery, sight replacement. Those were on the public's mind. Some of the issues relating to quarantine are relatively new. Bringing this bill in will highlight to people just how important the health care system is as it relates to quarantine.

As I have dealt with and looked at this bill, a number of questions have come up from a number of people. I would like to talk a bit about the bill and what I see as an important part of it. I also want to answer some of the questions I have received from people who have talked about their concerns.

One concern raised is why there is no protection or compensation for people who are quarantined. I asked the hon. member that question on the last round. It is my understanding that the Department of Justice is looking at compensation and considering the proper wording.

Members who have concerns regarding that issue should rest assured that is definitely part of the concerns of the ministry and it will deal with the issues of compensation for people who are quarantined. Everything from Workers' Compensation situations to employment insurance are things that make this a encompassing and detailed act.

The other question that comes up is, why is the bill is so urgent at this time? As I mentioned, we could talk about the SARS scenario. It offers authorities related to people departing Canada as well. My hon. friend from Peterborough made a valid point. It is not only people coming into Canada who are the concerns. It is also people leaving.

Government Orders

I am from Ontario. We know what happened during SARS outbreak. It affected everything, including tourism. People were not coming to Canada. As we well know, we have a country built on tourism. We have a tremendous amount of support, for example, from people in the United States who come to Canada. As a result of this legislation, I think we will ensure that people continue to come in this great country.

The next question is, why so little consultation? There was a lot of consultation with the public and the provinces. We can always do more in that regard. I want to commend the health committee that looked at this. I did not have the opportunity to sit on that committee, but I did have the opportunity to read some of *Hansard*. I know the committee did some fine work in terms of consultation.

● (1640)

It is always difficult in committee to do the type of consultation that is needed because there is always so little time, as there is in this House, to pass things. However I do want to say, in a non-partisan way, that the committee had some good consultations on this.

We have attempted, as a government, to work with the public health community as a first step. I want to commend the minister in that regard. I know she has done an excellent job in dealing with a lot of the public health community groups that are out there that have given us, I think, some very good ideas.

We also want to consider the minimum requirements to allow flexibility to handle further public health emergencies because, as I said, this is an all-encompassing act that would look at a lot of those areas.

We want to continue to work with the stakeholders as we continue to go through what I consider phase two.

The Quarantine Act impacts on other sectors. One of the questions that has been asked, particularly by people on the financial side, concerns the financial impact of those costs.

I know that when it comes to the health care deal, the \$41 billion over 10 years is a tremendous amount of money but getting virtual unanimity from all political parties and all provincial and territorial premiers to sign the deal was not an easy thing to do. However, when we are talking about the \$41 billion, cost becomes a very important part of it because so much goes into the areas I have mentioned and people want to know what the cost will be for this particular impact and what the cost impact will be as a result of this legislation.

I believe, having looked at it and having had some discussions with people in the financial field, the act is consistent with the initial norms in managing serious infection scenarios. The cost of having inadequate tools is much greater.

I will highlight that. To this day the cost and the impact on the economy, by not only lost wages of people but lost tourism, was absolutely tremendous. We have a tremendous amount of tourism because we are blessed with having one of the most beautiful countries in the world. We have everything from oceans to mountains to beautiful scenery. Tourism is very important and when we look at the cost, the cost of this Quarantine Act is far less than if we were hit with just one serious situation.

I know some people look at the financial cost but most of us are more concerned about the human impact. However the financial impact has been taken into consideration.

What do we know about the public's receptiveness for this act? I know in the public opinion polls health care is the number one issue and it has been for the last number of years I have been in politics. I was at the provincial level for about 13 years and it has been the number one issue going back to the early 1990s bar none.

As a result of some of the things, the influenza, the SARS outbreak, I think we have seen probably over the last little while even more concern relating to health care and certainly during that period of time. I guess it was the springtime during that period of time that in terms of the public opinion poll it would have even been greater than it was at any other time.

The number one issue for people in this country is health care. I therefore think the Quarantine Act has broad support right across this great country, which is why I am a little concerned with the opposition not wanting to get this legislation through.

Why do the provinces feel they are not being respected in their jurisdiction? That is something that comes up on a lot of the bills that we deal with. I know it is an important issue to all provinces, and certainly having been a provincial MPP for 13 years I know the jurisdiction questions. I know jurisdiction is important to provinces like Alberta and Quebec. Some people in this country believe that the way to deal with that is to simply send the money from the federal government off to the provinces and let them deal with it because it is their jurisdiction.

● (1645)

I am not one who believes we can do that. When we are talking about the Quarantine Act and about dealing with something right across the country, we cannot talk in isolation. It does not just affect Ontario or Alberta or any of the other provinces. It affects the entire country and we cannot do it in isolation.

This is one of the cases where I believe that the federal government can play a coordinating role. I say this to my hon. friends, particularly in the Bloc who come from Quebec and want to respect the jurisdictions, we all believe in that but there are times when we have to look at things from a national perspective. It is a very delicate balance.

I think the Quarantine Act tries to respect the provinces' jurisdiction while at the same time ensuring that a nation-wide plan is in place. I think Ontario raised that concern. I was there during that period of time. I happened to be sitting in the chair and I remember the member who was the health minister coming in every day. I used to ask him if he was okay because he was losing so much weight working on this. One of the concerns was that we needed a national plan. The provincial government was saying that it needed to make sure that the federal government was ready for the next time and God forbid there is a next time that something like this happens.

Government Orders

The Government of Ontario and the federal government worked very hard during that initial crisis but we need to learn from that. For people who have concerns about this act dealing with the provincial governments on the health care issue, they only need to look at the health care deal that was signed with the other provinces.

Every province and territory, every Liberal New Democrat and Conservative premier signed the deal, with flexibility by the federal government for the Quebec government to sign the deal. I think the same thing can apply to the Quarantine Act. There can be flexibility, protecting the jurisdictions of the provinces, that are very mindful of their jurisdiction, but ensuring that there is both money and a plan through this act to deal with it at the national level.

If we look at the situation I firmly believe that one of the big concerns relating to the provincial governments is the cost factor. I am hopeful the \$41 billion that will go to the provinces with these deals, and with the agreement with Quebec that was specially put together knowing the concerns that it has, that we can come up with a Quarantine Act that will protect provincial jurisdiction.

Under the British North America Act health care was given to the provincial governments because it said in one line something about hospitals going to the provincial jurisdiction. We never realized in those circumstances that the health care system would become the number one spending priority of all provinces. In Ontario, health care has gone from 24% to, I believe, easily 35% and may go to 50% of the cost.

If we do not have the federal government involved both with money and with acts like the Quarantine Act, I do not believe the province of Ontario could solve all the health care issues. When we talk about waiting lists, sometimes we may have to give the provinces the money and allow them to do with it what it needs to do. It may be for example that Ontario has problems in one particular area that are good in another area. Manitoba may be strong in one area. Wait lists may be longer for knees and not so much for heart. We need to ensure that the provinces have the flexibility to make the decisions of how they are going to deal with it.

However when it comes to things like the Quarantine Act, it is the one issue that transcends all borders. In the past it was not as big a problem because people were not travelling as much. Now within 24 hours we can have any type of disease spread right around the world just simply by people getting off a plane and bringing a particular disease into any particular country.

I am very mindful of the jurisdiction of the provinces but I believe that the Quarantine Act will protect that.

The big concern I have heard from people, and some of the members have mentioned it as well in their speeches, is that the minister appears to have extraordinary power to make interim orders and what checks and balances are in place.

• (1650)

When the Minister of Health was here during the member's speech I briefly had an opportunity to share some of my thoughts with him. I was pleased to have been able to spend some time with the Minister of Health on some of these issues. When the Prime Minister was kind enough to take some of the new members aside he asked me what the difference was between the federal House and the

provincial House. I told him that in all honesty, in the short period of my mandate, within six months, I had spent more time with the Minister of Health as a federal member than I did in the 13 years in the provincial legislature.

As part of my MBA, I put together a strategic plan for the ministry of health and actually gave the plan to the minister of health, a very fine lady and a good friend of mine, Elizabeth Witmer. She looked at me as though I was crazy for putting a strategic plan together for the provincial ministry of health. She must have thought I was a bit of a keener but it was as a result of putting together my MBA.

However I must say that the federal minister has spent more time with backbenchers like us asking questions on this particular bill and has been able to allay some of our concerns, one dealing with the interim orders.

There are examples of scenarios where ministerial orders would be critical, declaring public emergencies. We all hope and pray, of course, that this will never be needed, but the minister is required to table the order in Parliament in 15 days. There is a fine line between giving enough power to get the job done by the minister of health and then also ensuring that the minister of health of any political stripe does not have too much power. It is a very difficult and very delicate balance.

What is being proposed is that the minister would be required to table the order in Parliament in 15 days, which I believe would allow the people in the House to then deal with it.

I will say in a critical way but not in a non-partisan way that I do not blame any particular side. Although as hon. members would imagine, I obviously have a bias on which side I think is making the House work.

One of my concerns is that when we see the antics that are being played with the bill, we need to ensure that if we give more power to the House, we do the right thing. One of the right things is passing the bill, not playing political games because we are looking at the other picture.

I have been outspoken throughout my career about wanting to give more power to the people. I know a lot of my hon. friends feel that way as well, but there is a fine balance.

I do not think anybody in the House believes that the Quarantine Act is not important, but we still get caught up in the politics of wanting to adjourn the debate, move on and not deal with it. We rise on points of order but there is a time and place for that. When it comes to acts that are so important, so critical to the future of the country, we need to get away from the political games.

On the one hand, I am one of those who have fought for 13 years for giving more power to the legislature, which this will do through the order in Parliament in 15 days. The trouble is that this is my first minority government and, unfortunately, sometimes the political games hon. members play make this place not work the way it should. However I am sure everyone would come through in any type of crisis.

Government Orders

I want to say to all members of the House that this is a very good legislation. We need to work on it to ensure it puts in place the health care of our citizens, which is so important. Let us work on the bill. Let us put all the partisanship aside and get on with the job we were sent here to do, which is to help people by passing the amendments to the Quarantine Act.

• (1655)

I thank all the members for patiently listening to me. I look forward to their comments and questions, because at the end of the day we are all here to help improve the safety and the health of all of the citizens we were sent here to represent.

ROYAL ASSENT

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): I have the honour to inform the House that a communication has been received as follows:

Rideau Hall
Ottawa

May 5, 2005

Mr. Speaker,

I have the honour to inform you that the Honourable Marie Deschamps, Puisne Judge of the Supreme Court of Canada, in her capacity as Deputy of the Governor General, signified royal assent by written declaration to the bills listed in the Schedule to this letter on the 5th day of May, 2005, at 4:03 p.m.

Yours sincerely,
Barbara Uteck

The Schedule provides that the Royal Assent was given to Bill S-2, An Act to amend the Citizenship Act—Chapter 17, and to Bill C-29, An Act to amend the Patent Act—Chapter 18.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1700)

[English]

QUARANTINE ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion in relation to the amendments made by the Senate to Bill C-12, an act to prevent the introduction and spread of communicable diseases.

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague who has just spoken and who has had a considerable amount of experience at the provincial level. Obviously from his remarks he has indicated that he understands very well the requirement in a strategic way, with respect to the changes that have been made in the environment and events that have occurred recently, that there have to be strong partnerships that are going to be looking at those changes, and our reactions have to be immediate.

However, the question still remains in the minds of many people. It seems as if every day there is an invasion of privacy and issues come up that challenge people's personal rights and individual rights.

The public generally is always trying to balance out those kinds of changes against the higher public good.

I have a question for the member. In view of that sort of propensity that exists out there, at this particular time why is the government determined that there must be an update of the Quarantine Act within the context and along the lines being suggested? I think people would like to know that in a very clear and succinct way.

As evidenced when we had the anti-terrorism legislation and all of the concerns that were related to individual rights and human rights, people wanted to know what the compelling reason was for changes being made that affected those rights. I would ask the same question of our colleague. What is that very compelling reason that exists as to why we are moving on these amendments to the Quarantine Act in this manner?

Mr. Gary Carr: Mr. Speaker, as I have said privately to the hon. member, I have followed the member's career and I have always admired him because he has come to this place and he always asks the tough questions, even of his own government. I think that is what he was sent here to do. Part of his background is the municipal sector, where those tough questions are asked. I am happy to respond to his question because I know he has done that in a number of fields, certainly, including the environment. I want to say how much I respect the hon. member.

During my speech I did not have a chance to talk about other diseases. We focused a little on SARS because it was the most recent, and on the avian influenza, but there is also the West Nile virus. I did not have an opportunity to talk about the West Nile virus as well. This is another disease that was of major concern during that period of time, particularly in Ontario.

The answer to the question is, what happened during that period of time? On February 2 in the Speech from the Throne, the government committed to modernizing the health protection legislation as an ongoing objective. What happened as a result of some of these concerns is that the government in the throne speech in 2004 said it was going to take a look at that.

Then, Dr. David Naylor, chair of the National Advisory Committee on SARS and Public Health, also recommended legislative changes to government to better address the risks posed by new or re-emerging infectious diseases. I apologize that I did not get into that part of my remarks, because I wanted to. Unfortunately we do not always have enough time, but I think this is very critical.

I think it is critical because Dr. David Naylor, as chairman of the national advisory committee, is the person who is in the best position to tell us as legislative people what we should be doing. That is the reason the government acted; it was not only in the throne speech based on what happened with the provinces and the concerns expressed to the federal government by the Ontario government, particularly over SARS, but also because of Dr. David Naylor's concerns. I think everyone in this House has a tremendous amount of respect for him and is very pleased to have him in that role. He is one of the people who recommended the legislative changes.

Government Orders

I say to those members who may be reluctant to take a look at this that when we have someone with the expertise of Dr. Naylor recommending these legislative changes in this act, I think we should listen very carefully.

I will say to the hon. member that this is one of the big reasons. It is because of what Dr. David Naylor said. An update to the Quarantine Act will address these urgent issues regarding the spread of communicable diseases.

In one last point, I have listed a few of the diseases and I may have missed a couple, but the concern is that there are new diseases springing up all the time. These are diseases that we may not know about.

I thank the hon. member for his tough questions and hitting right to the point as he usually does. I hope I have answered the member's question.

● (1705)

Mr. Brent St. Denis (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I also would like to say that while my colleague just behind me was newly elected last June to the House of Commons, he has a long experience in the provincial legislature and a distinguished career indeed. I appreciated and enjoyed his remarks on this important legislation.

I would like to ask him a philosophical question. It is hard for us to imagine being quarantined. It is hard for us to imagine that terrifying impact on the quarantined individual or family, whether they are quarantined at an airport, a hospital, a home or wherever the case may be.

Let us try to imagine ourselves in their shoes. It must be a time of great uncertainty and a time of great trepidation. Not only are they in those moments facing the uncertainty of their own health, but they are also facing the uncertainty of what the health system and the rules and regulations will do to them.

However, let us put ourselves in the shoes of the community at large. It is important that the health of the community at large also be protected. While we can look with great sympathy upon those who are quarantined by necessity, and we should, that quarantine has the effect of protecting the larger community.

As we so often see in society, we have to balance the needs and the rights of the individual against the needs and the rights of the community at large. That is why it often requires great wisdom to draw the dividing line between what circumstances or actions of an individual have consequences for the larger community and when the larger community must take action.

I know it is a bit of a philosophical question and I know that this legislation attempts, and I think attempts well, to find the balance between those two extremes: the needs and the quandary facing the quarantined person and on the other hand the need of the community to protect itself, as we saw with the SARS outbreak, as the member spoke about in his last response, and the avian flu. We can also think back to long ago and smallpox epidemics and polio and so.

These do not come without consequences to the community and to individuals. I wonder if he could talk about that balance between the

needs of individuals and the needs of the community when it comes to matters such as these.

● (1710)

Mr. Gary Carr: Mr. Speaker, I know people who were quarantined during the SARS crisis. They were in their homes with telephones and the media reporters could not get close because obviously they did not want to get the disease. The media was photographing people as they were on the phone talking to reporters. They were being asked what it was like and what was happening? It was very powerful to see those people quarantined not knowing what was happening to them being on the phone speaking and relating what it was like. I remember those images of people in their homes.

The member asked what it would be like. We cannot imagine what it would be like to not know if they had the disease because they did not feel bad, but they had the potential. To a person, what struck me, is that the people were not concerned about themselves when asked what was their biggest concern. Most of the people were concerned about whether they had infected a family member, whether it be a child, a spouse, a mom or dad, an aunt, an uncle, or a grandparent. They were not concerned about themselves, but for the people they were in close proximity to.

I was struck at that time how Canadians, when they were down to the crunch facing the disease themselves, were more concerned with what it was going to do to their children. The people being interviewed were not concerned for themselves or what may happen to them but were concerned for family members. That is what Canadians are all about. In a time of need, they are still more worried about other people than themselves.

However, later, the people in quarantine began to ask about compensation. We need to take a look at that because they were concerned, if they had to take days or three weeks off in a quarantine, what that would do to their families and income. That needs to be addressed. Hopefully, that will answer the member's question.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Social Development (Social Economy), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is truly a pleasure to rise to speak to Bill C-12 today.

I have to say right off I find it deplorable that we have a fairly important piece of legislation in public health terms and, because of the official opposition, are obliged to play very political and partisan games. It is unfortunate because the public has long been awaiting a review of such a bill, which is very relevant, as all my colleagues in this House have already said.

● (1715)

[*English*]

I remember that when the former opposition party was known as the Reform Party and it came to the House, it came to do things differently. Well, we have seen how it does things differently in terms of blocking government legislation and also playing very partisan political games in order to stall.

Bill C-12 is an act to prevent the introduction and spread of a communicable disease. It comes to us from the other chamber and it speaks about migration health and its relationship to the rapid spread of disease in today's globalized world. As other speakers before me have said, we do live in a global community where the spread of disease can happen very rapidly.

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

From a pan-Canadian perspective, migration health and its related consequences pose a threat to the health and safety of all Canadians. A serious communicable disease can now spread to any part of the globe in less than 24 hours, which is less time than the average incubation period for most diseases. We know this firsthand from our recent experience, and as other speakers have said on this side of the House, through SARS.

This means a person incubating an infectious disease can board a plane, travel 12,000 miles, pass unnoticed through customs with no visible signs of illness, take several domestic carriers to their final destination in Canada and still not develop symptoms for several days, thus infecting many other people in their journey before the conditions becomes detected. This was the case in terms of SARS.

The concept of superspreading events further illustrates the magnitude of concern of public health experts. This concept has been used to describe situations in which a single person has directly infected a large number of other people. For example, 103 of the first 210 probable cases to be reported in the Singapore SARS epidemic were infected by just five sources.

This new migration health reality is becoming a cross-border issue of growing importance with numerous ramifications for public health, including implications to the social and economic fibre of our society. Further, the international community remains at risk if the appropriate measures are not administered to stem the spread of disease.

With the looming threat of an influenza pandemic, the impact to the global world may be catastrophic. The nature of this outbreak has the potential to be exponentially worse than SARS in its capacity to cause human suffering. In Canada alone, it is estimated that 5 to 10 million people could become clinically ill.

Once inside Canada, this public health emergency will place enormous strain on our front line workers and the local delivery of health care services. Economic and social upheaval will ensue as provinces and territories are stretched beyond their jurisdictional capacity.

While the principle of uncertainty prevails in global health care, officials do know that economic and psychosocial upheaval is contingent on how virulent the virus is, how rapidly it spreads from one person to another, the capacity for early detection, and how effective and available preventive and control measures prove to be.

The challenge is containment. How do we keep this confined to a small group, which was not the case as we know with the SARS

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epidemic? Mitigating the threat at hand will depend on vigilant border control activities, often the first line of defence in public health.

It will also rely on the collaborative efforts from cross-jurisdictional partners to stop the spread of disease, including the hospital isolation of infected people, voluntary home quarantine of close contacts, and the quarantine of anyone potentially exposed.

To manage emerging and re-emerging public health threats, legislative measures need to be considered across all levels of government. There is an urgent need for updated legislation to mitigate the heightened risk of global disease transmission and support modern public health practices in times of crisis. Legal preparedness remains a critical component when managing migration health related consequences.

In his report on Canada's recent experiences with SARS, Dr. Naylor highlighted the limitations of Canada's current quarantine legislation and health surveillance. The report recommended that Canada's governments seek to harmonize federal, provincial and territorial public health legislation with specific attention to health emergencies.

To date, existing federal powers under the Quarantine Act are limited in scope and do not reflect the changing face of emergency preparedness and response in the 21st century.

The Quarantine Act prevents the importation and spread of a communicable disease at points of entry. However, it does not address the domestic spread of an infectious disease once inside Canada.

The modernization of public health protection legislation so that it reflects today's realities is an ongoing Government of Canada objective, most recently demonstrated by the creation of the Public Health Agency of Canada, the appointment of the first Chief Public Health Officer last fall, and the commitment to support the work of the agency as found in this year's budget.

Another important step is Bill C-12, the modernization of the Quarantine Act. The Quarantine Act was created in 1872. As we know, much has changed in the last 133 years, including the mode of disease transmission. Problems in the current act include many outdated and redundant provisions, and the lack of harmonization with proposed revisions to the international health regulations.

Further, an order in council is required to amend the schedule of listed diseases, which hinders the ability of the minister to act—

● (1720)

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. parliamentary secretary, but I do have a ruling to give which I think may be of interest to her and other hon. members. This will not detract from the time that she has, but it does interrupt what I am sure was an erudite explanation of whatever technicalities there were in the bill before us and the amendments. I will proceed with this ruling if that is satisfactory with hon. members.

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I am now prepared to rule on the point of order raised earlier today by the hon. Deputy Leader of the Government in the House concerning the admissibility of the amendment to the motion to concur in the Senate amendments to Bill C-12, an act to prevent the introduction and spread of communicable diseases.

I would like to thank the hon. minister for raising this matter, the hon. House leader of the official opposition, the hon. member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl, the hon. member for Kelowna—Lake Country and others for their comments.

As hon. members know, it is well-established in our practice that an amendment must be relevant to the motion it seeks to amend. This is notably the case when the House considers amendments made in the other place. I refer the House to page 674 of Marleau and Montpetit. It states:

When the House receives amendments to a bill from the Senate, the amendments are then submitted to the House for consideration...it is for the House itself to decide whether it accepts or rejects the amendments...The motion must relate exclusively to the Senate amendments, and not to other provisions of the bill that are not contemplated by the amendments.

It seems to the Chair that the proposed amendment strays quite far from the original Senate amendments before the House and introduces elements entirely extraneous to the debate at hand.

I might also mention that there is a technical difficulty with the amendment in that it does not express a decision with regard to Senate amendment No. 1.

[*Translation*]

As Marleau and Montpetit explains at page 674, "The motion may at the same time reject certain amendments made by the Senate, and concur in or amend others".

[*English*]

One concludes from that citation that the House may hold differing views on different amendments and may so inform the Senate in its message. However, it cannot remain silent on one portion and respond only to another.

Accordingly, the Chair concludes that the amendment to the motion for concurrence in the Senate amendments to Bill C-12 is not in order because it is not relevant to the main motion it seeks to amend and because it is technically flawed.

Debate, therefore, may resume on the main motion. I call on the hon. parliamentary secretary to resume her remarks and apologize again for interrupting, but I thought the House would want a decision on this matter.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: Mr. Speaker, I am glad to know that you have been very vigilant and quick in your decision so we can continue with this excellent piece of legislation. I move:

That this question be now put.

• (1725)

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member should have waited a little longer and used up the rest of her debating time before she moved her motion. I hate to see her debate cut short when I am sure she had more riveting and relevant remarks to make.

I was not going to ask any questions but, Mr. Speaker, when you said "questions or comments," I thought I should at least rise and make a comment. Obviously I accept the ruling that you have made with regard to my amendment to this piece of legislation.

I want to make the comment that just because my amendment was ruled out of order does not mean that I or other members of the official opposition ever intend to let up on our daily quest to hold this arrogant corrupt Liberal government accountable. We are going to continue to do exactly what we are doing and ensure that at some point in time we can exercise our democratic right and express non-confidence in the government.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: Mr. Speaker, I am sure the hon. member will be paying close attention because we do talk about relevance in this place. As I said earlier, we are going to do things so much differently than the way they were done in the past. We will not even bother to comment on the relevancy of what just happened. I will continue with my riveting remarks.

It was in 1872 when the Quarantine Act was created. What we are trying to do with Bill C-12 is to make sure that it is a modernized Quarantine Act and it is designed to work in lockstep with provincial public health legislation to make sure that the legislation is an effective tool for the challenges we face today.

Bill C-12 offers enhanced protection at Canadian points of entry but outfits the minister with additional authorities to ensure rapid and decisive action to prevent the spread of disease, and as was said earlier, to take into the account the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It will give the minister authority to issue emergency orders which is consistent with the Public Safety Act.

It will enable the minister to administer exit control measures, divert air carriers to alternate landing sites, restrict travel into Canada, or even close Canadian border points in the event of a public health emergency. It will also allow the minister to establish quarantine facilities at any location in Canada if it becomes necessary to isolate travellers infected and/or exposed to a serious communicable disease.

The proposed act lists many more communicable diseases for which Canadian officials can detain departing passengers. It ensures that the administration of quarantine powers is carried out by qualified professionals and that control measures are tailored to the present circumstances.

Bill C-12 will also clarify respective enforcement roles under quarantine powers and, as I and other speakers on this side of the House said earlier, guarantee that human rights are adequately protected. While the updated act authorizes the collection and sharing of personal health information, the authorization to do so is limited to what is required to protect the health and safety of Canadians in the name of public health.

Bill C-12 protects privacy rights and maintains an appropriate balance between individual liberties and the public good. The Public Health Agency of Canada has engaged many stakeholders in the development of a modern Quarantine Act. Bill C-12 also reflects the efforts and commitment of dedicated members of this House and the Senate.

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During the examination process the Senate Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology adopted an amendment to strengthen Bill C-12. The new amendment will enable members of the Senate to play a role in the making of quarantine regulations by requiring the tabling of regulations before both Houses. This seems to be a very reasonable amendment. Even the official opposition members agreed, after a little haggling on the procedural rules, with this piece of legislation.

Overall, this legislative renewal initiative reflects the government's commitment to strengthening Canada's public health system in addition to meeting our international obligations. In the spirit of collaboration, federal, provincial and local public health authorities have a significant role to play in protecting public health. Enhanced uniformity in public health legislation equipped with an array of modern tools and emergency measures will enable Canada to effectively prepare for and respond to the contemporary challenges in today's globalized world.

By introducing Bill C-12, the Government of Canada is responding to the call by public health experts and Canadians alike. Once enacted, the new Quarantine Act will ensure an effective response capacity in the event of our next public health crisis. This federal legislative tool is a critical piece in the establishment of a comprehensive public health system.

I will close by saying that it is our collective responsibility to pass this bill. It is our collective responsibility in terms of making sure that our citizens are protected from the spread of disease. As other members said earlier, I also would like to express my strong support for Bill C-12. I hope that all members of the House see the merit in this new health protection legislation and support this very important piece of legislation in terms of preventing the spread of communicable diseases in Canada.

• (1730)

Mr. Don Bell (North Vancouver, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I welcome your ruling as it enables us to carry on with the debate on this important piece of legislation. To try to use a procedural opportunity for what I would call partisan politics to delay debate on this important bill is unconscionable.

Dealing specifically with Bill C-12, the public health system in Canada is central to maintaining the health and safety of our population. Public health is the science and the art of protecting and promoting health, preventing disease and injury, and prolonging life. It is the public health system that will identify and monitor health threats and invoke appropriate interventions to mitigate the risk at hand. Ultimately a strong public health system will improve the health status of Canadians. In the context of emergency preparedness and response, our public health system is often the first line of defence against emerging and ongoing threats.

As we know, diseases do not respect borders. In today's global village they arrive by plane and they present themselves at our doorstep within hours. This is why Canada's public health system must be equipped with an array of modern tools to maintain a state of readiness to effectively manage the next wave of disaster, and we have no idea what or when that is going to be.

There is an intricate web of protection in place that is invisible to many, but it reflects the tireless efforts of those on the front line and

those who support local response capacity in public health. When the public health system is working well, few take notice, but in the event of a new emerging disease like SARS, the role of public health is captured in the public's eye.

The country's response to SARS highlighted the urgent need for national leadership and coordination of public health activity across the country, especially during a health crisis. Rapid decision making, decisive action, and effective response measures are critical to managing future threats to public health.

Many of us remember the important work undertaken by Dr. David Naylor, chairperson of the National Advisory Committee on SARS and Public Health. Examining the events surrounding SARS, the Naylor committee made recommendations for change, including the need for legislative reform in the area of public health management.

In support of these recommendations and the vision that inspired the Naylor report, the Senate Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology was also authorized to examine and report on the infrastructure and governance of Canada's public health system.

In addition, the Kirby committee examined Canada's ability to respond to public health emergencies arising from infectious disease outbreaks. In the Kirby report, initial steps were identified to facilitate the renewal and reform of health protection and promotion in Canada, including the creation of a new health protection agency to be headed by a nation's doctor, a chief medical officer of health.

Public health is a shared responsibility in this country. While provinces and territories bear primary responsibility for protecting public health within Canada, the federal government provides quarantine services at Canadian points of entry, the oldest health measure to date.

Once a traveller passes through customs, each province and territory has its own public health legislation to contain and to control the spread of a communicable disease within its own jurisdiction. Recent experiences in the global public health arena, including SARS, mad cow disease, West Nile virus, and the arrival of avian influenza, have underscored the urgency for updating public health legislation across Canada. To date, many health protection laws are woefully outdated, including the federal Quarantine Act which has been largely unchanged since 1872.

• (1735)

The need for a legislative overhaul in public health is required to manage contemporary public health threats with local, provincial, national and international ramifications. Action now in terms of legislative renewal will help ensure that Canadians feel confident once again that their governments are indeed protecting them from future health threats.

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The Government of Canada has moved swiftly to strengthen public health by establishing the newly created Public Health Agency of Canada and the appointment of the first chief public health officer. The modernization of the Quarantine Act will complement the government's strategy in strengthening Canada's public health system and serve in the management of any new disease outbreak that might threaten the health and safety of Canadians.

The revised Quarantine Act, Bill C-12, was designed to complement existing provincial and territorial public health legislation. It offers protection at Canada's international borders and ports of entry by controlling the import and export of a communicable disease. Simply put, this bill will add another layer of protection in public health. In the pan-Canadian toolbox for public health, this legal instrument provides the federal government with the authority to detect public health risks at the first point of contact when travellers, conveyances, goods and cargo are entering the country.

The Quarantine Act is one of Canada's oldest pieces of legislation and, as I have stated already, it has not been significantly modernized since 1872. Once enacted, a modernized Quarantine Act will ensure that the federal government has the enabling authority to mitigate the risk and threat of global disease transmission.

It is not only our obligation to Canadians that we need to consider. Public health protection must be a global effort. Currently, the World Health Organization is initiating revisions to the international health regulations to ensure that countries around the world are doing their part to support rapid, decisive action to stem the spread of disease.

There are a number of important features of Bill C-12 that make it truly useful in the disease management program. It is very powerful legislation for the Public Health Agency that requires due diligence when administered.

With quarantine officers stationed at major international airports, Bill C-12 provides these federal agents and the Minister of Health with the authority they need to marshal a comprehensive and immediate response capacity at points of entry. Bill C-12 does not affect the interprovincial movement of travellers and conveyances but complements existing provincial public health legislation.

Recognizing the need for ongoing collaboration with our partners in public health, the newly proposed Quarantine Act will streamline the process embedded in public health by eliminating the distinction between listed and other diseases. It will modernize enforcement powers, including ministerial authority to divert air carriers to alternate landing sites or indeed to prohibit entry into Canada. Further, it gives authority for the procurement of quarantine space anywhere in Canada, including the ability to compensate the owner of a facility in a manner consistent with responsible and prudent government spending.

What about human rights under this new quarantine legislation? Bill C-12 will also ensure that human rights are adequately protected for providing the right to legal counsel, an interpreter and a second medical opinion. It will clarify authority to collect and share personal health information for the purpose of protecting public health.

The new bill appropriately balances individual liberty rights in the need to protect the public. It also respects the jurisdictions of our

provincial and territorial partners, clarifying roles and responsibilities in the shared public health domain.

• (1740)

The Public Health Agency of Canada has engaged many shareholders in the development of Bill C-12, including the Senate Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology. The final product enables the federal government to carry out what is essentially a responsibility to the citizens of Canada and further to the international community.

We also cannot ignore that in addition to the serious and significant health issues obviously related to the passage of this bill, I would like to remind all members of the House that there are also severe economic impacts of infectious disease issues. I would remind members of the disastrous economic impacts of the SARS outbreak which occurred in Toronto. The public concern translated very quickly and definitively into an economic slowdown, both in terms of retail sales and, more important, also on tourism.

I should note here that as a result of that impact on Toronto and the impact on tourism and to the economy of Toronto and Ontario, our government decided to show confidence in Toronto. Our Prime Minister called what I understand was the first federal cabinet meeting ever held outside of Ottawa. This was a show of confidence not only in Toronto and Ontario but in Canada, and showing us to the world.

The economic impact of SARS affected tourism travel around the world, not just Canada. I do not need to remind my colleagues in the House about how important tourism is to the economy of Canada, and not just to a city like Toronto because it could be any major Canadian city that has an air travel hub to other parts of Canada. The negative economic impact on tourism is not just related to the city with an international airport, but to all areas of Canada to which tourists are attracted. Tourists travel through those hubs to the various parts of Canada, from sea to sea to sea.

This is important to all of Canada, and I can speak for my province of British Columbia and in particular the greater Vancouver area. As members know, Vancouver has both an airport and a busy seaport and is recognized as the gateway to Asia Pacific. We know and have discussed in our various committees in Ottawa and in the government about the importance of the emerging Asia Pacific market and Canada's role in that.

Of recent note, I could talk on the issue of tourism. We are now in the process of finally securing approved destination status for travellers from China. This has long been an issue that has been recommended to us by tourism groups across Canada. These tourists will come through either Vancouver or in some cases directly through Toronto. This has the opportunity to significantly increase the number of tourists, particularly from China.

The kinds of fears that occurred during the SARS outbreak were such that they had a very serious potential impact on travellers who wanted to come from Asia Pacific. I can tell members of personal knowledge relating to Japan where parents were afraid either to come or to have their children come to Canada because of the SARS impact. In China, which has a one child policy, they are very nervous about sending their children here to learn English or to experience Canadian culture because they only have one child.

Regarding the impact on my region of greater Vancouver and British Columbia, we have over 20,000 foreign students currently engaged in some kind of English second language training in the greater Vancouver area, and the effect of SARS was dramatic. My riding of North Vancouver has an international college that relied heavily on Japanese students. It had a dramatic reduction in the number of students to the point that it caused it to have to refocus and change the way it operated. The college has now varied its program to include other adult students as well. In the end there was a positive impact and net effect, but we still have not regained total confidence in terms of some of these Asia Pacific countries with the fear of having their young people come to Canada.

The benefit of having them come here to be educated is they learn about our Canadian way of life, our Canadian democracy and our values. When they go back to their countries, they are some of the best ambassadors we could have as they grow up and take a role in their countries.

●(1745)

I would mention also the port of Vancouver. It is the second busiest port in North America after Louisiana, which is mainly an oil base port. It is not only the busiest port in Canada, but the second busiest port in North America. The movement of goods and services, which can be affected by an infectious outbreak or the discovery of some substance, such as a powder, can have a huge impact which can shut down that port.

Recently, as a government, we decided that we would lend support in recognizing the growth of the port trade to Canada and to British Columbia, which is the new container port in Prince Rupert. Forty million dollars of federal money will be flowing to help the economy in that area. This provides us now with a second major rail connection for goods into Canada.

The port of Vancouver, for a variety of reasons like rail capacity, is struggling to handle the container capacity. Some of those goods are going past British Columbia, either flowing through American ports and in fact going all the way around Panama to come up on the east coast, which adds costs and time delay and makes us less attractive as a country.

COSCO, the Chinese overseas shipping company, in the last few years named Vancouver as its first port of entry in North America, which was a huge economic advantage to us.

We have the ability now, with the port of Prince Rupert, to have a second major rail connection that will benefit Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario and all of Canada. Importers now can bring goods both into Canada and flow them through to the United States.

All those issues can be affected by a serious health outbreak, an infectious disease outbreak, which can come in the form of product

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into Canada as well. As we know, there is the risk of the West Nile virus, which is not coming from west to east, but coming from east to west across North America.

Last weekend, when I was in my home riding of North Vancouver, I read newspaper articles and heard radio accounts of the preparations that were being taken for West Nile, which had not yet arrived visibly in British Columbia and the greater Vancouver area, but it was felt it was just a matter of time.

The potential impact and the effect this will have on municipalities with the spraying program, with the proximity of the spraying to school children and to recreational areas, which are very important, is of huge impact.

* * *

●(1750)

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): I have received notice from the hon. member for Cariboo—Prince George that he is unable to move his motion during private members' hour on Friday, May 6. It has not been possible to arrange an exchange of positions in the order of precedence.

Accordingly, I am directing the table officers to drop that item of business to the bottom of the order of precedence. Private members' hour will thus be cancelled tomorrow and the House will continue with the business before it prior to private members' hour.

It being 5:49 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

BANKRUPTCY AND INSOLVENCY ACT

The House resumed from December 3, 2004, consideration of the motion that Bill C-281, an act to amend the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act, the Canada Business Corporations Act, the Employment Insurance Act and the Employment Insurance Regulations, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

[English]

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): Before beginning today's private members' business, I have a short statement to make concerning the provisions of Bill C-281, an act to amend the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act, the Canada Business Corporations Act, the Employment Insurance Act and the Employment Insurance Regulations.

As with all private members' bills, the Chair has examined this bill to determine whether its provisions would require a royal recommendation and thus prevent the Chair from putting the question to a vote at third reading. It has been the practice to raise such concerns about private members' bills before the House takes a decision at second reading.

Private Members' Business

Among other things, Bill C-281 proposes to give workers first priority to amounts owed them after the bankruptcy of their employer; to ensure that payments from a bankruptcy do not form part of employment insurance benefits; and to provide a procedure whereby employees of bankrupt companies can proceed with claims against the directors.

In this particular case, Bill C-281 contains one provision which appears to require a royal recommendation, that is, a provision which proposes spending that solely the Crown can recommend under our system of parliamentary government.

Clause 6 proposes to modify section 19 of the Employment Insurance Act dealing with deductions to benefits. The clause adds the following provision:

Payments made to a claimant out of proceeds realized from the property of a bankrupt or by the government of Canada or of a province in the event of a bankruptcy shall not be deducted under this section.

In other words, where currently amounts owed to workers form part of the calculations used to determine benefits, this bill would propose that they not be used for future calculations of those benefits. This would result in greater benefits being paid to claimants. Therefore, this provision authorizes additional spending, and such spending would require a royal recommendation.

In its present form, I will decline to put the question on third reading of this bill unless a royal recommendation is received.

Today, however, the debate continues on the motion for second reading as scheduled and the motion shall be put to a vote at the close of this second reading debate.

SECOND READING

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am speaking on Bill C-281, an act to amend the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act, the Canada Business Corporations Act, the Employment Insurance Act and EI regulations, as presented by the member for Winnipeg Centre.

I am pleased to make my thoughts known as the member of Parliament for Kootenay—Columbia. I have always taken my commitment to people in my community very seriously, wanting to ensure that their interests are protected and that there is a proper balance between employers and employees.

Shortly after I was elected in 1993, there was a major bankruptcy in my constituency that affected many hundreds of people. As a matter of fact, more than 1,100 people ended up applying for EI benefits as a result of that bankruptcy. The communities throughout the Elk Valley and the East Kootenays had to deal with harsh realities far beyond their control.

The bankruptcy caused tremendous hardship for families and individuals who were impacted by the failure. My office worked diligently on behalf of former employees of the corporation to help them secure portions of their pensions. Unfortunately, those portions turned out to be a small portion of the pension funds owing to them.

Through these events, I became acutely aware of the importance of good legislation in the relationships between corporations, their creditors and their employees. I became convinced that in the event of a bankruptcy there is a distinction between wages owed and the

status of employee pension funds. Combining pensions and wages in one piece of legislation is not only impractical but unworkable.

As written, this bill is poor legislation. If Bill C-281 were to receive approval from the House of Commons to move to committee, the first thing I would recommend to the committee is the entire removal of the pension provisions.

There may be value in reviewing pension provisions and protection of pensions in bankruptcies, but consideration of pension provisions should be drafted in a totally different bill.

A pension review must include two tracks. Pensions involve employer-employee relations, collective bargaining, previous negotiations, existing pension funds and regulations. In most cases, there is provincial jurisdiction combined with current financial market forces in the national and international investment community. This names simply a few of the issues.

The second track must recognize that pension funds and employee interests can be reduced to dollars and cents, but that money is totally different from funds that can be realized from tangible assets secured by lenders. We must remember that lenders have choices. They are not compelled to lend money. Anything that increases risks increases the costs of borrowing. A lender may reach a point of choosing to withhold funds as risks increase.

Let us take a look at the wage replacement portion of Bill C-281 as distinct from the issue of pensions. There must be a balance between the interests of wage earners, employers and potential lenders. This balance makes the difference between having a healthy business economy with good, productive, meaningful jobs and the potential for impoverishment.

Whatever legislation we become involved in, it is the responsibility of the House to ensure it does not inhibit relationships between businesses, potential lenders or investors. Put another way, it is the responsibility of legislators to create and maintain a healthy economic environment for all Canadians.

As written, Bill C-281 would place wages owing upon bankruptcy ahead of the rights of secured creditors. Its purpose is to provide superpriority status ahead of all other creditors, including secured creditors, for amounts owed to workers in the event of bankruptcy. This would include wages and salaries, payments in the form of severance or termination pay arising from collective agreements and legislation.

The problem is that secured creditors lend money on the basis of real assets, such as property, equipment or accounts receivable, and calculate the potential of realizing cash from those real securities. In other words, while the liability to the company for wages will be a specific amount of money, that liability for wages has no direct relationship to the security pledged to the lender.

Private Members' Business

•(1755)

Let me explain it this way. By way of example, a company may have \$150,000 security in the form of current accounts receivable. The lender may choose to advance a fixed loan or line of credit up to a limit of \$100,000 against a \$150,000 asset. If the workers have a combined potential of \$5,000 payable for two weeks' work the lender would reduce the \$100,000 loan or line of credit by at least \$5,000, if not \$10,000.

This represents a withholding of dollars to protect the lender against possible claims by workers in a bankruptcy. This seriously diminishes the value of the company's securable assets.

It is irrelevant whether we like or dislike this harsh marketplace reality. The fact is, lenders make choices based on their judgment of what makes good business sense to them. Lenders have choices. They are not compelled to lend money.

If Canadian laws put lenders at a disadvantage in Canada, they could make choices to lend in other international jurisdictions. This would create negative pressure for Canadian businesses by increasing costs of loans and decreasing the amount of money available in the Canadian marketplace.

As of December 2003, there were 2.3 million small, medium and large businesses operating in Canada. Almost every business from time to time requires loans or operating lines of credit. That money is almost invariably secured by some form of asset. If all workers in Canada are given superior status over secured creditors, we will see a significant decrease in the amount of credit available to businesses. This would inhibit Canadian businesses' opportunity to access funds necessary for continuation of operations or expansion.

The fact is that while there are 2.3 million businesses, there were only 8,128 business failures in 2003. This represents only four-tenths of one per cent of all businesses operating in that year. To underline or restate, 99.6% of Canadian businesses would have access to business loans reduced as a result of four-tenths of one per cent of business failures. This is simply bad economic policy that reduces jobs and opportunities in Canada. I believe there is a better way.

Beginning with the premise that workers' interests must be protected in bankruptcy, I support the creation of a wage earners' protection fund. Its purpose would be to protect workers while eliminating potential liability for lenders. This is not a new idea. Many European countries have a form of wage protection plan.

It would be built on the original principles of employment insurance, where insurance premiums are paid by employers and employees into a fund that would be based on actuarial data. It would ensure that there were funds available to protect the employees' interests in the four-tenths of one per cent of Canadian businesses that end up in bankruptcy. It would be funded separately from employment insurance and would stand alone.

We have reviewed the European experience and can state that the premiums would be calculated in pennies, not dollars. The existence of the employee protection plan would eliminate the necessity of the consideration of employees' wages from any potential borrowing or lending activity. The fund would pay benefits to workers affected by bankruptcy within a matter of weeks. This would eliminate the long

wait for money that employees endure as settlements wind through months and sometimes years of bickering and negotiations.

The Conservative Party has had a subcommittee dealing with this issue, with the encouragement of our leader. We have worked with actuarial tables and based estimates on foreign experiences in European countries.

We believe businesses drive our economy, creating good jobs, wages and benefits, creating wealth for our nation. We fund health care, social programs and other desirable public expenditures from that wealth. The Conservative Party is conscious of the protection of the Canadian wage earner within a balanced, productive business climate.

It is a matter of responsibility for us to create an environment in which personal dignity and a healthy society can thrive.

In summary, Bill C-281 is poorly drafted and unworkable, but because it is an effort to recognize and give greater protection to workers in bankruptcy, I will be voting in favour of it at second reading.

However, if the bill is not rewritten in committee to reflect the necessary changes I have outlined, I will not be able to support it at third reading.

•(1800)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Vincent (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to congratulate the member for Winnipeg Centre for having introduced the bill to amend the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act to provide better protection for workers. Several of my colleagues in the Bloc Québécois, myself included, would have introduced it if that had not been done already.

There is no need to tell you, therefore, that I am in favour of this important bill that would put workers first on the list of creditors when companies go bankrupt. The reason is simple and obvious: when a company goes bankrupt, it is indebted first and foremost, in my view, to its employees. They should be paid for the hours they worked. In addition, some employers do not hesitate to dip into the workers' pension fund in order to pay off creditors. This means that employers are paying off creditors with employees' money—money that does not belong to them. This is the reason it is somewhat understandable that the Liberals would hesitate to support this bill because they themselves have been misappropriating workers' money by looting the employment insurance fund.

Workers have much more to lose in case of bankruptcy than financial institutions. In light of the billions of dollars in profits that these private institutions make every year, it is only natural that the first creditors paid off by employers in case of bankruptcy should be their workers, whose only source of income is their employment.

Companies that are in danger of having to close their doors put employees in a difficult position. It is not only very hard for employees to evaluate the financial health of the companies for which they want to work but also more difficult for them to absorb a loss of income than it is for large private investors, such as banks.

Private Members' Business

Changing the law would give workers more security and companies would also benefit. Employers experiencing financial difficulties are at greater risk of losing their most valuable workers if their personnel does not have any protection. If employees knew that they would be first in line to be paid in case of bankruptcy, would they not obviously be less likely to leave their jobs if they sense that their company is in financial danger? Both employees and employers would benefit.

Unless the government wants to support creditors such as banks, I do not see any reason for members not to support this bill. One cannot be against virtue itself!

Hon. members will surely remember that, during the last election campaign, the Bloc Québécois made a commitment to amend the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act, so that workers' salaries and pensions would be the first debts to be repaid. Personally, I find it even harder to understand how, in a case of bankruptcy, the employer can have access to the workers' pension fund. A pension fund is money set aside for retirement. The employer also contributes to the pension fund, as provided under the collective agreement. That money does not, in any way, belong to the employer, and it should not be used to repay creditors in case of bankruptcy. The problem is that the current legislation allows that. This means that a company can use other people's money to repay its own debts. This is incredible. It does not make any sense.

What would hon. members say if the law allowed the government to dip into their pension fund when there is a budget deficit? There is no doubt in my mind that Bill C-281 would get the unanimous support of this House.

Yet, these members accept the fact that companies can freely use the workers' money to repay debts that have nothing to do with them. I am anxious to see how the Liberals from Quebec will vote on this issue.

In the meantime, they say the bill goes too far, that we have to think about the investors. The workers need to figure out how to cope with a smaller retirement fund, find another job, since they unwittingly did volunteer work for their employer. It is the wealthiest in our society who oppose this bill to protect the weakest from abuse in the private sector. The individual suffers for the benefit of the major investors, yet again.

With investment comes risk, but it is a calculated risk. A job should not be calculated as a risk factor, a job should provide security and stability. A worker should not have to assess the risk of a company declaring bankruptcy. Did the employees at Nortel—which experienced explosive growth a few years ago—calculate the risk of downsizing? Was it their responsibility to do so? Thousands of employees were laid off even though Nortel did not declare bankruptcy. Nonetheless, if it had, would it have been the responsibility of these workers to have calculated the risk?

• (1805)

Would it have been their responsibility to use their salary and their pension fund to pay back the company's creditors? No, they are not investors, they are workers.

Furthermore, an investor only invests if he has the means to do so. He does so in full knowledge of the facts. If an employee could

predict the risk of bankruptcy, then maybe he would choose to work elsewhere. The working person does not have the means not to work. Otherwise, he would spend his time, in my opinion, pursuing personal interests, not professional ones. The investor has a choice.

We are talking about labour peace and justice. To me, justice is allowing those less able to bear the burden to be reimbursed first. The worker is not an investor, but a taxpayer, an employee. His salary and pension fund should not be used to reimburse any creditor. It is ridiculous, disrespectful and irresponsible. Drawing from salaries and pension funds in such a way is theft. It is unethical and makes no sense. Workers must be protected, I will not back down from that.

Everyone knows there is a fiscal imbalance between the provinces and the federal government. Everyone agrees except the Liberal Party. Today, we are talking about a social imbalance between workers and creditors.

In addition, the current Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act threatens industrial harmony. I have two examples drawn from events that took place in my riding in the 1990s.

I am thinking of the bankruptcy of the Peters plant in Granby. Management took all the money to pay back creditors, and none of the employees got paid for their work before the bankruptcy. There was no money left. The employees had to initiate legal proceedings against the three principal shareholders in order to reach an agreement and be paid what was due them. Is that the way it should be? I do not think so.

The example of the Simond firm is all the more flagrant. Simond has subsidiaries in a number of countries. The one in Granby went bankrupt at the end of the 1980s or early in the 1990s. It represented only 3% of the company. Following the bankruptcy, in order to pay back its creditors, this major international company drew \$6 million from the employees' retirement fund. After a court battle, which went on for seven years, the unionized employees won the case. It took seven years for them to recover the money that had been stolen. In the meantime, 15% of the retirees died.

Furthermore, at the end of this considerable struggle, the law was tightened up so that workers could no longer turn to the courts to defend themselves. The fact that it is legal to take money from the employees' fund was already absurd, but then, the government tightened the regulations. I feel faint when I hear this story or tell it or even think about it. Let me continue, however.

Allow me to point out an interesting fact. Who was the main supporter of the workers throughout these long lean years of the Simond dispute in which the workers' money was stolen? It was none other than the member for Shefford at the time, the current Minister of Transport. I would like to congratulate the member for Outremont on the work he did at that time. So I can reasonably expect him to support this bill. I also expect the Quebec Liberal lieutenant to show leadership among his colleagues so that Bill C-281 will also have the support of Liberal members.

• (1810)

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am extremely pleased to speak on this important Bill C-231 introduced by my hon. colleague from Winnipeg Centre.

Private Members' Business

First, in a way, I am totally saddened, because, while the bill is already at second reading, members still have many concerns. Many members are more inclined to take the side of major employers than that of the workers, even though they like the workers to vote for them when an election comes.

That is unfortunate because, at present, the employees get their pensions, back wages, vacation pay, severance pay and any other benefits only after the taxes, creditors and suppliers have been paid.

The best case in point is what happened just recently when the pulp mill in Nackawic, New Brunswick, went bankrupt. As the principal creditor, the company's president, who was from the U.S., made sure he got paid first by another company he owned.

Earlier, I heard the Conservative member express concern for Canada's banks. The Conservatives, and the Liberals as well, worry about the banks, while the banks are making between \$5 billion and \$6 billion in profits. Are you afraid they will pack up and go home?

I will tell you something, dear friends in the House of Commons. There are people working underground in the Brunswick mine who risk their health and safety every day. How many miners in Canada do that? How many people work in the woods, from morning till night, with sweat on their brow?

We may be shaken here in the House of Commons by the sponsorship scandal. Nonetheless, even if an election is called, every one of us will receive our salaries and our pensions. However, that is not the case for miners, forestry workers, the man or woman working at the paper mill in Nackawic from morning till night. They will be the last to get paid. It is shameful.

As a former union representative who negotiated many collective agreements, I would say to my colleague from Winnipeg Centre that the bill does not go far enough. The bill should require companies that offer retirement funds to put that money elsewhere rather than keeping it, waiting to declare bankruptcy and then not paying out the pensions to these employees.

It is a shame to see people who have given 20 or 25 years of their lives to a company that made profits, that had some good years, but that went bankrupt because it was not properly managed, with the result that these people lost their pensions.

It was sad to see these people cry in Nackawic, New Brunswick, because they lost their jobs after working 25 years for a company that made millions of dollars in profits. It is sad to see that the last ones to get anything are the workers.

I want this bill to make it to second reading but, at the same time, it must be accepted by the federal government. However, in order to be adopted before the election, the Liberals must stop listening to the right-wing party, namely the Conservatives. Even the member for Kootenay—Columbia said that employment insurance premiums should not be in dollars, but in cents. This is because they do not believe in employment insurance and in workers. They do not believe that when a worker loses his job, he should get some income. That is what is shameful.

● (1815)

[English]

It is a shame that today there are still places of employment where people go to work for the company from morning to night, where men and women work for 25 or 30 years and if the company goes bankrupt, they lose their wages. The workers are the last ones to be paid. The creditors get paid first.

The CEO of the pulp mill at Nackawic had another company. He was the principal creditor and he was the first one to get paid before the workers. Does the government support that? Is that what the government is going to do? What a shame. It is a shame to treat the working people of our country like that.

At election time, every member of Parliament is very pleased to shake hands with people and ask for their support. The candidates are always pleased to shake hands with people at the gates of a plant and ask, "Could I have your support? I will support you if I become a member of Parliament".

We hear today that we have to be careful about the banks, that the banks will not lend money. If they do not want to lend money, they close their doors and go home. We do not need them. They are not all going to close their doors. We do not have to take that threat from anyone. We have to respect Canada's working men and women who get up every morning to go to work for years and years.

Will we as members of Parliament pass a bill in the House of Commons that if we lose in an election, we will lose our pensions? Are we ready to do that? Why are we not ready to support the working people of our country? Why does the same thing not apply to the working men and women of our country as applies to us?

It would not be a shame if for once Parliament looked at Bill C-281 and passed it. I think many companies would agree with it because those families live in communities. When they lose their pay and pension, the whole community suffers for it. Over 850 people work at Brunswick Mine in Bathurst. If the mine went bankrupt and the workers lost their pensions, what would happen to the communities of Bathurst, Chaleur and Acadie? It would hurt those communities. The banks would be laughing. That is what would happen if members do not support this bill.

It would be a shame to water it down to where it does not mean anything anymore. What is wrong about doing a day's work and getting paid for that day of work? What is wrong about making it law that the company would pay for everyone's houses and get the bank to give them the money? The money does not belong to the bank. It belongs to the labourer who works all week. It is his money.

When a pension plan is negotiated, there is a limit on how much one will get from the company, two per cent, four per cent. Does that mean there will be no more pension plans, that we put everything in wages and we get paid right away? Is that the message we want to send to workers? No, we say to people to make a pension plan, make something good of life with the little bit of money they have left. That is what we say, but in the end, if the company goes bankrupt, we will steal it from them, we will take it from them, and that is wrong. It is morally wrong. It is totally wrong.

Private Members' Business

Anyone who gets up in the House of Commons and does not vote for this bill should never go to a plant gate and shake hands with the working people come election time because they have no respect for the working people if they do that. I recommend very strongly that all parties in the House of Commons think about what they will do and what they will say to the people when they go to the ridings looking for votes. It is just unbelievable.

The CEO of the Royal Bank will not cry on the night a company goes bankrupt. I never see them cry; it is just one big group that was lost. But I see the families cry. I see the father and the mother crying. I see the kids crying. The kids will go to school with nothing. That is what we have done. It is totally wrong not to support Bill C-281.

● (1820)

[*Translation*]

That is why it is important to adopt this bill at second reading. People must have an opportunity to express their views. Personally, I would even adopt the bill in its present form, because it is so important. If it is amended, it would be to improve it.

Let us look after our citizens and after Canadian families. As I said, I cannot even imagine that a parliamentarian would vote against this bill and then ask workers to support him as a member of Parliament. It would be tantamount to asking workers to vote for him to represent them in Ottawa, and then to rob them of their pensions, salaries and fringe benefits. How could anyone say they would rather defend the banks than support the poor people who worked so hard and who put their health and safety at risk?

I am pleased to have had these 10 minutes to address this very important bill for workers.

[*English*]

Hon. Jerry Pickard (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-281 put forward by the member for Winnipeg Centre contains a number of amendments to increase the protection for employees for losses that they may incur in their employment when a bankruptcy occurs. In short, Bill C-281 proposes to create a super priority for all employees' claims that would be ranked ahead of creditors, including any secured creditors.

These amendments would represent a radical change to the bankruptcy system. In doing so they would create a number of direct and perhaps unintended adverse consequences on the Canadian economy.

These amendments would fundamentally change the treatment of debt in bankruptcy. In effect, the proposed regime would override established contractual and legal rights of existing secured creditors which are a fundamental feature of a market economy. Let me explain to members of the House the economic effects that proposed amendment would have. I have to focus my intention on small and medium size businesses and how it would impact them.

It is well established that commercial lenders finance businesses based on the value of assets used to secure loans. In other words, business owners use the value of their company's receivables and inventory as well as fixed assets as collateral to secure financing. Lenders use a borrowing base formula to determine the amount of money the business owner is qualified to borrow.

The single most important determinant of a business's borrowing base is the realizable value of the assets pledged to secure a loan. The lower the realized value in bankruptcy, the lower the borrowing base. The higher the realized value in bankruptcy, the higher the borrowing base. This is where bankruptcy laws intersect with commercial lending practices.

Bill C-281 creates a super priority for claims of losses by employees in bankruptcy. This priority is open-ended and unlimited. As such it creates a great deal of uncertainty for lenders when they are making a lending decision. Given this uncertainty, lenders will face greater difficulty determining the realizable value of a borrower's collateral. As a result, lending institutions will, to protect their own asset base, reduce the amount they will lend to people.

Reducing credit availability by changing the priority scheme in the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act as Bill C-281 proposes would have detrimental effects on small and medium size business enterprises. These businesses are the most vulnerable to a change in lending practices as they generally have a less diversified source of capital financing than large enterprises.

Small and medium size enterprises account for 98% of all businesses in Canada. Indeed, 75% of all Canadian businesses have fewer than 10 employees. In terms of employment, in 2003 more than five million people, or 49% of our private sector labour force, worked in small and medium size businesses. Those with 100 employees or less are small and medium size businesses. According to Statistics Canada, small businesses made the greatest contribution to net job creation over the period of 1996 to 2003.

We cannot put the engine of economic growth at risk. Bill C-281 would put the brakes on building the 21st century economy as we know it today. Not only would the proposed amendments reduce credit availability, but they would also increase the cost of credit for those who could obtain it. Lenders would re-evaluate the credit risk associated with their entire commercial portfolio, and would conclude that Bill C-281 increases the credit risk. This would translate into higher interest rates not only for existing loans, but for every commercial loan going forward.

● (1825)

The proposed amendments would also require increased monitoring by both lenders and borrowers. This would lead to increased costs for each business, as lenders would pass on their increased monitoring costs. Moreover, businesses would face higher internal compliance costs to ensure that any loans they may have remained as performing loans.

Private Members' Business

I am strongly opposed to the measures that would cause small and medium size businesses to incur added inefficiencies. Businesses, particularly small and medium size enterprises, would be negatively impacted by increasing the cost of capital. As a result, these firms would find it more difficult to expand and create employment opportunities. In fact, I would also argue that these companies would be more reluctant to invest in innovative technologies. This would have a negative effect on the growth potential of small and medium size businesses and the entire Canadian economy.

The implementation of an open-ended super priority scheme for employees' claims in bankruptcy would also have a detrimental effect on businesses that compete on an international market. None of Canada's major trading partners have such a regime of bankruptcy in their laws. This runs counter to the smart regulations approach that our government has espoused.

In the United States wage claims are given preferred status similar to that in Canada. In some European countries as well as in Australia there are government funded schemes guaranteeing the payment of wages and vacation pay.

The Canadian economy has a strong reliance on international trade, particularly trade with the United States. Close to 80% of our GDP is trade related. Our livelihoods and standard of living are dependent on Canadian businesses and their ability to compete in the international markets. Indeed, with a small domestic market, the steady expansion of multilateral trade is critical to the economy and the continued prosperity of our nation.

However, the proposed amendments contained in the bill would have severe restrictions on Canadian firms' access to capital as well as increasing costs. As such, the proposed amendments would place Canadian firms at a competitive disadvantage in the international marketplace.

All of us in the House are concerned about the problems faced by employees whose employer has gone bankrupt, particularly those who experience unpaid wages and other work related benefits. However, the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act is a framework law which has horizontal application across the entire economy. Changing it requires careful analysis and balance. There could be unforeseen ripple effects which could have serious unintended consequences on the economy.

The government agrees that there is a need to protect workers who remain unpaid when their employer goes bankrupt. Indeed, it is my understanding that as we speak, the government is studying options to improve the treatment of workers' claims in bankruptcies. I want to see reform to improve the protection for employees' claims in bankruptcy, but Bill C-281 is certainly not the answer.

• (1830)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister (Canada—U.S.), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by saying how pleased I am to participate in this debate on Bill C-281. The principle, the concept and the objective are all worthwhile.

I grew up in a union family. My father was a union member all his life. He even was the secretary-treasurer on the executive board of

his union for the region of Quebec. All that to say that I have seen the tough times families can go through when the head of the household is a union worker or a labourer.

I was a shop steward for several years before completing my law degree. I was first elected to this place in 1997, and the Dominion Bridge Lachine plant, a subsidiary of Dominion Bridge Corporation, whose reputation is well known to all hon. members, I am sure, was located in my riding. This major company was a symbol of economic development in Canada during the 19th century and the early part of the 20th century.

Soon after my election, this company went bankrupt and the plant located in my riding faced closure. This meant that some 300 employees, the majority of whom were members of the steelworkers local, would be losing not only the wages owed for the work already performed, but also pension benefits, among other things.

In the community of Lachine, we immediately set up a Dominion Bridge Lachine survival committee, comprising representatives of the local metalworkers' union, my provincial counterpart, MP François Ouimet, municipal officials of the day, myself, local people involved in economic development, representatives of the CEDC, the community economic development corporation, and of Transaction pour l'emploi and many other interested parties. With the help of the Fonds des travailleurs du Québec, we interested another company in buying the assets of Dominion Bridge Lachine and hiring all the employees.

In the meantime, the employees had to depend on employment insurance. I must congratulate the department of the time, which handled the employment insurance scheme. It immediately set up a committee of officials to help workers apply and ensure that they did not lack money to put food on the table and pay hydro, the rent or the mortgage.

Bill C-281 does have problems, though. I would be prepared to have it referred to committee, because I think committee is the best place to examine the question and the objectives. It does have some serious problems, though, in connection with use of employment insurance, for example.

• (1835)

[*English*]

I would like to speak to that because what is quite interesting is that at times life and reality overtake a piece of legislation that is being proposed. I would like to talk about the issue of protecting workers for payment of wages that they are owed if their employer declares bankruptcy.

An hon. member: Pensions.

Mrs. Marlene Jennings: One of the members in the House continues to call out "pensions". The member is quite right. The government needs to look at the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act, the Canada Business Corporations Act, the Employment Insurance Act and so on.

I wish to deal with the issue of wage protection. Today, the Government of Canada announced a wage earner protection program. I would like to read part of the news release that went out. It states:

Private Members' Business

Today, the Minister of Labour and Housing, accompanied by the Leader of the Government in the House and the Minister of Industry announced the Government's intention to move quickly to establish the Wage Earner Protection Program. The program will help protect workers by providing a guaranteed payment of wages owed up to \$3000 should their employer declare bankruptcy.

Under the present bankruptcy system, workers' claims for unpaid wages rank after secured creditors. As a result, many workers have to wait from one to three years to get a fraction of the wages owed to them—13 cents on the dollar on average. These workers are often the most vulnerable and working in low-wage jobs in small businesses (under 10 employees) in the construction, retail and food services sectors. Under the proposed program, affected workers could make their wage claim right away and should receive their money about six weeks later.

The Minister for Labour and Housing stated:

This program is about fairness and helping the most vulnerable workers. The Wage Earner Protection Program will ensure that workers get their wages quickly, when they need it most. It will also ensure that payment of wages will no longer depend solely upon the amount of assets in employers' estates.

The Leader of the Government stated:

There is a need to address a number of issues related to employees and businesses that suffer bankruptcies or insolvencies...Our Government has put forward an ambitious legislative agenda that reflects the priorities of Canadians.

The member who put forward Bill C-281 is correct in that protecting workers and employees, who have earned wages when their employer goes under bankruptcy or insolvency, is something that is a priority for Canadians. The Leader of the Government also stated:

We want to ensure workers do not face undue hardship if the business or enterprise, where they are employed runs into difficulty.

The Minister of Industry stated:

The Government recognizes that the present insolvency system lacks an effective mechanism to provide certain and timely payment of the wages owing to workers whose employers go into bankruptcy or receivership under the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act...The Wage Earner Protection Program is designed to remedy this gap and to form part of a comprehensive insolvency reform package, which I intend to introduce this spring.

When the member was calling out the word "pensions", I wish to repeat that the Minister of Industry has already stated that there will be a comprehensive reform of the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act.

• (1840)

When the Minister of Industry states that he intends to bring forward a comprehensive insolvency reform package this spring, that means that the issue of workers' pensions, when their employers either goes into bankruptcy or insolvency, will also be addressed.

I call on hon. members to look carefully at Bill C-281, but I do believe it should go to committee for that kind of extensive analysis.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I put forward Bill C-281 because there are 10,000 bankruptcies a year in this country and more often than not, or all too frequently at least, workers are left owed back wages, benefits and, most important, pension contributions from underfunded pensions.

Hearing the debate today and even in the first hour of debate, I have to remind my colleagues that we are in the House of Commons. This is the place where we are supposed to be advocating on behalf of ordinary Canadians, the common folk, and what I hear are apologists for the banks more than anything else, frankly.

Those who are opposed to the idea of bankruptcy protection for ordinary Canadians are acting like corporate shills for the banks by

saying that we need a tag day for them and we need to ensure they get everything that is owed to them in order of priority over and above the needs of the working people. Something is terribly backwards with this tone and this attitude.

In actual fact, there is money in most bankruptcies to pay the employees. My bill seeks to put workers first on the list of priority when we are distributing the assets or the proceeds from a bankruptcy instead of dead last where they are now. I do not see what is so revolutionary about that concept. Were we not all sent here by ordinary Canadians to advocate on their behalf?

Somehow things got so screwed up in Ottawa. Big money has been running things here for so long that all of the legislation seems crafted in such a way as to serve the interests of big money. Here we have an opportunity to do what is right for ordinary grassroots Canadians and put them first and we hear people saying that it might interfere with the banks' ability to be secure, blah, blah, blah. Honestly, I could spit with anger. It really makes me angry.

We have recent concrete examples. My colleague from Acadie—Bathurst was explaining perhaps the most egregious example of what is wrong with the bankruptcy legislation in the country. He spoke about the Nackawic pulp mill where people with 35 years' service were getting zero of their pension contributions, while \$100 million of assets were being distributed among the creditors. Workers are not viewed as creditors.

The interesting thing is if the company has been operating for the last few months of its existence by ripping money out of the pension plan that makes workers creditors. They are investors in the company but unwillingly and unwittingly. They deserve a super priority, in my view, for that very reason.

There is a trust relationship between the employer-employee that is ancient and, I argue, is sacrosanct and should not be tampered with. That trust relationship is, "I will come to work every day and I will lay down my life to dedicate it to your financial enterprise and you pay me x amount of dollars". That is the trust relationship that exists. However in the event of bankruptcy that gets tossed out the window and everybody gets their share before that employee gets a single cent and more often than not there is nothing left for them.

When I hear people acting as apologists for the banks over the interests of ordinary Canadians, it makes me wonder which side they are on in this very simple debate.

I will tell members where Canadians stand. In a recent Vector poll, 87% of Canadians said that the current bankruptcy laws were unfair, needed to be changed and were overdue to be changed. We have had commissions and studies for 30 years saying that our bankruptcy laws are unfair and do not represent the interests of workers.

The NDP for the last three Parliaments has submitted virtually the same bill. It came within four votes when my colleague from Churchill put it forward as a motion two Parliaments ago; that is, two people voting the other way and we could have had some satisfaction. The workers at the Nackawic mill would not have been screwed if we had listened to the member for Churchill back then.

Year after year, decade after decade goes by with no protection for employees in the event of bankruptcy. The number of bankruptcies is not going down and the protection of employees certainly is not changing.

• (1845)

I cannot believe anyone who was sent here by ordinary Canadians to advocate on their behalf would be a shill for Bay Street and an apologist for the banks, instead of an advocate for ordinary working Canadians. It is a shame.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

An hon. member: On division.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): I declare the motion carried. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Industry, Natural Resources, Science and Technology.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[English]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when we have these late shows sometimes they come long after we have asked the original question. A few weeks ago I asked the Minister of Finance when he would be bringing in legislation to deal with the Atlantic accord.

For those who are not sure what I am talking about, a deal was made between the federal government and the provincial Governments of Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia to improve benefits from offshore development. This deal was made, of course, after a tremendous amount of hassle and pressure from the opposition and also from both provinces. However the deal was made and an agreement was signed but then we wait weeks and weeks for legislation.

The thought at the time was that the government would bring in the two page piece of legislation, which it had developed and to which, by the way, both provinces had agreed, but it dragged on and on. Consequently, I asked my question.

The legislation has now been introduced and members may be wondering why I am still looking for an answer.

Hon. John McKay: Good point. Why did you leave it on the order paper?

Mr. Loyola Hearn: The parliamentary secretary asks why I would leave that question on the order paper?

One of the reasons is that I am having withdrawal symptoms from not having my daily fix of the parliamentary secretary. For weeks on

end we had fairly heated exchanges on this very issue, me promoting the offshore development and the revenue sharing, and the parliamentary secretary speaking on behalf of his minister who was finally, by the way, told by the Prime Minister to get the job done.

The parliamentary secretary was telling me that we should not get any resources because he felt that my province and the province Nova Scotia were always there with our hands out looking for someone else's money. However I have assured him that we were there asking the government and Ontario to give us back some of the money that we sent up here.

The problem is that when the legislation was brought in the government brought it in as part of an omnibus bill. The government will argue that it is part of the budget bill. Yes, of course it is part of the budget bill. It will also say that it cannot change that unless it gets unanimous consent in the House.

We have to remember that just a short while ago our leader made a motion in this House, seconded, not by the leader of the Bloc, but by the leader of the NDP, to split the bill and bring forth singular legislation on offshore revenue sharing.

We did not get unanimous consent. It was not the Conservatives who said that could not be done. It was not the NDP, the friends of the Liberals. It was the Liberal Party that said no, with, by the way, the assistance of the Bloc. The Liberals and the Bloc teamed up to prevent Newfoundland and Nova Scotia from having a singular piece of legislation that could quickly go through this House.

I will let the parliamentary secretary tell me why he is making those promises to wait and wait for the revenues, waiting until this whole—

• (1850)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance.

Hon. John McKay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would be happy to answer the hon. member's question. He put his question on March 7 as to when the legislation would be tabled. We answered on March 24 with the tabling of Bill C-43 the budget implementation bill. That was the complete and full answer to his question of March 7. He apparently does not like to take "yes" for an answer.

Bill C-43 contains a whole number of things. The hon. member is right. It is an omnibus bill. It contains provisions for child care. It contains provisions for the new deal for communities. It contains payments to Saskatchewan for the operation of the equalization program and for payments to support British Columbia in dealing with the mountain pine beetle infestation. The government cannot make these payments until Bill C-43 passes.

Last year's budget provided some examples of additional measures for provinces. I would argue with the hon. member. I do not know why one priority is a greater priority than any other priority. All those priorities I just mentioned are of great significance to particular people in particular areas as is his priority.

Adjournment Proceedings

Last year's budget did the same thing. We had some example of additional measures to the provinces, which were again payments to Saskatchewan for the operation of Crown lease base in equalization, payments for the implement of the equalization renewal and payments for the \$400 million made available to provinces and territories in support of the national immunization strategy and public health capacity. Again, why is one priority greater than the other priority? The way the government handles these things is through an omnibus bill.

I will briefly review what is in the offshore accords. It allows Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia to ensure that they retain 100% of their respective offshore resource revenues and equalization payments come on top of that. There were quite a number of months of discussion and on February 14, I do not think there is any significance to be attributed to that date, the Government of Canada reached agreements with those provinces.

First, the agreements provided 100% protection from equalization reduction or clawbacks for eight years as long as the provinces received equalization payments.

Second, an upfront payment of \$830 million for Nova Scotia and \$2 billion for Newfoundland and Labrador to provide the provinces with immediate flexibility to address their unique fiscal challenges.

Third, these agreements provide for a further eight year extension as long as the province receives equalization in 2010-11 or 2011-12, and that its per capita net debt has not become lower than that of at least four other provinces.

This is a unique window of opportunity and exceptional treatment for those two provinces. The uniqueness of this deal is because they face unique challenges. Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia have the highest net debt of all provinces as a percentage of GDP. In the case of Nova Scotia, 43%. In the case of Newfoundland and Labrador, 63%.

Newfoundland and Labrador in particular has an unemployment rate of 14.9%. Therefore, the government felt that those unique challenges required specific response and that specific response was given in Bill C-43.

The hon. member is going to complain that the bill is not moving forward. The reason the bill is not moving forward, he should look in the mirror and while he does so, he should take the mirror over to his leader.

• (1855)

Mr. Loyola Hearn: Mr. Speaker, and I thought he was my friend. The opposition does not bring in legislation. The government does. It has not brought the budget bill before the House. Liberals are afraid to bring it before the House. Even if they do, the bill has 23 other clauses, all of them complicated. They have to go through the House. They have to go through a committee. We might be looking at hearings. They have to come back. They have to go through the Senate.

The legislation on the offshore is singular. It has been agreed upon with the provinces. It is not legislation like all the others that have to be debated, that will have to be changed, amended, whatever. It is clean-cut and done. All we need is the legislation in here for a vote. That is why we asked for singular legislation. They could not do it for us, but they could buy off the NDP for \$7 billion and bring in separate legislation to handle it. That is not the way—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance.

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, upon the delivery of the budget, the Leader of the Opposition pronounced himself quite satisfied with the budget. Then I suppose he had an another epiphany of some kind or other and decided that the budget was not adequate or sufficient.

We had this toxic food fight at one point, that this was a big issue in the budget and the Conservatives would defeat it on the basis of one word, namely, "toxicity". Now he is not satisfied with the budget at all and has made it perfectly clear that the Conservative Party will do everything it can to bring down the government if the bill is presented to Parliament.

The hon. member only has to look in the mirror to see why the bill is not moving forward.

• (1900)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a. m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:00 p.m.)

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