



CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 140 • NUMBER 094 • 1st SESSION • 38th PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Monday, May 9, 2005

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, May 9, 2005

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

•(1100)

[*Translation*]

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ) moved that Bill C-312, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act (appointment of returning officers), be read a second time and referred to a committee.

•(1105)

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): Before beginning private members' business, I have a statement to make concerning the provisions of Bill C-312, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act (appointment of returning officers).

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.

This bill proposes to alter the manner in which returning officers are appointed. Presently, section 24 of the Canada Elections Act gives the governor in council the authority to appoint 308 returning officers at pleasure. Bill C-312 proposes that appointments be made by the Chief Electoral Officer following an open competitive process for a term of 10 years.

This initiative already has been the focus of some commentary regarding the financial initiative of the Crown. Specifically, on April 11, 2005, during the take note debate on the Standing Orders, the member for Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean argued that the need for a royal recommendation is being interpreted much more strictly now than in the past, and that this particular bill does not entail any new or additional spending authorization. Indeed, he claimed that in the 2nd session of the 36th Parliament similar initiatives were proposed as amendments to Bill C-2, an act respecting the election of members to the House of Commons, without any procedural objections being

raised regarding an infringement on the financial initiative of the Crown.

As to the matter of a stricter enforcement of the royal recommendation requirements, I would reply that the Chair is taking its responsibilities under Standing Order 94 very seriously. This is primarily due to the fact that all items of private members' business are now votable. Previously, they were not.

At that time, if a private members' bill appeared to require a royal recommendation but was not subject to a vote, then there was less of an obligation on the Speaker to inform the House of the exigencies of Standing Order 79(2), that is, the rules pertaining to the introduction of a royal recommendation.

[*English*]

I remind the House that on November 18, 2004, I alerted members to this situation. As I mentioned on page 1554 of *Hansard*, as the House has not yet begun to debate items of private members' business I felt that it would be of assistance to alert hon. members to the important impact that the requirement for a royal recommendation may have on their bills.

The standing orders leave no doubt that the House cannot be asked to decide on the motion for third reading of a bill requiring the expenditure of public funds unless proper notice of a royal recommendation has been given.

Should members have any concerns about the provisions of individual bills in this regard, it would be prudent for them to raise such concerns well before the third reading stage is reached.

•(1110)

[*Translation*]

It has been the practice in this Parliament for the Chair to raise concerns about private members' bills at the commencement of second reading debate so that submissions may be made before a decision is taken by the House at second reading.

Private Members' Business

In this particular case, Bill C-312 contains some provisions which caused the Chair to pause and consider its impact on the financial initiative of the Crown. As most members know, bills which involve new or additional spending for a distinct purpose must be recommended by the Crown. The royal recommendation is also required where a bill alters the appropriation of public revenue "under the circumstances, in the manner and for the purposes set out" in the bill. What this means is that a royal recommendation is required not only in the case where more money is being appropriated, but also in the case where the authorization to spend for a specific purpose is being significantly altered.

Bill C-312 transfers the power to appoint returning officers from the governor in council to the Chief Electoral Officer. Normally, the power to appoint includes the authority to pay. The transfer of this authority would appear to affect the manner in which spending was being authorized and so would appear to infringe on the financial initiative of the Crown. However, a closer reading of the Canada Elections Act seems to indicate that the authority to pay remains with the Governor in Council. Subsection 542(1) of the act states:

[*English*]

On the recommendation of the Chief Electoral Officer, the governor in council may make a tariff fixing or providing for the determination of fees, costs, allowances and expenses to be paid and allowed to returning officers and other persons employed at or in relation to elections under this act.

[*Translation*]

Therefore, it appears that the bill is solely transferring the power of appointment without transferring the authority to remunerate returning officers. If this is the case, there is no infringement on the financial initiative of the Crown.

Bill C-312 contains two other provisions which appear to involve spending. It is proposed that returning officers are to be appointed by means of an open competition. Although this will involve the spending of public monies, it appears to the Chair that this would be an operational expense of the Chief Electoral Officer that would be within the annual appropriations provided to his office.

Another provision fixes the appointment period for a returning officer at 10 years whereas it is presently at pleasure. This is not an infringement on the financial initiative of the Crown as it does not increase the public spending but only the identity of the persons to be paid over a 10 year period, that is, there would be fewer changes, if any, in the roster of returning officers during this period but the same number of returning officers in any event.

As with other bills, the Chair would seek short submissions from members on these specific points prior to the resumption of debate on second reading. In this way, the reasoning behind the decisions of the Chair in regards to the financial initiative of the Crown may be better understood, and the decisions will be dealt with in a timely manner. I believe that in the long run, the House will be well-served by this approach.

The Chair appreciates the patience of all members. The issues which are being raised on a series of bills in private members' business touch on some of the fundamental concepts of our system of parliamentary government. It behoves us all to ensure that this

process is conducted in a rational fashion so that decisions are consistent, and well-understood.

• (1115)

SECOND READING

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to my Bill C-312 on the appointment of returning officers.

First, I should point out that, while I am the one in charge of this issue right now, a review of the appointment process for returning officers has been a concern of the members of the Bloc Québécois, particularly since 1993. I would go as far as to say that it was already a concern after the first round, from 1990 to 1993.

Particularly since 1993, we in the Bloc Québécois have had the opportunity to lament this process, an attitude shared by many of our colleagues from the Conservative Party and the NDP, in our private discussions. I also remember discussions with some colleagues from the Liberal Party at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, where they agreed that the process for the appointment of returning officers was totally archaic and outdated.

Suffice to quote a recent statement of the hon. member for Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, I believe, who is now sitting as an independent. I do not have the clipping in front of me, but recently, about 10 days ago, he described the current process as archaic.

Canada boasts about giving lessons in democracy around the world. Chief Electoral Officer Kingsley often goes on conference tours. Members of this House travel to emerging democracies to supervise elections. We boast about being a model of democracy, we are so proud but, on the face of it, the process is flawed from the start because returning officers are not all fully and totally independent, which they should be in order to be able to play their role effectively.

That is why this bill is intended to clean up our political practices in the appointment of returning officers. Under the current system, the appointments are made by the governor in council or the government.

We can see that there are currently 308 filled returning officer positions across Canada. There are also 10 or so vacant ones, I might point out, while an election could be called within a week or two. On May 5, Chief Electoral Officer Kingsley told the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs that he was very concerned about 10 such positions still being vacant at this time.

Private Members' Business

So, upon examination, we see that the appointees have one thing in common. Directly or indirectly, they have been involved with the Liberal Party of Canada. They are friends of the government, former organizers of the governing Liberal Party. We have seen this first-hand; they are former Liberal Party candidates who were defeated. They would have us believe that, through divine intervention, they have suddenly become non-partisan overnight; they have forgotten their years as Liberal Party supporters and, now, they have become the guardians of democracy and the selection process by which our future parliamentarians will be chosen.

This bill proposes an open and transparent process where positions, based on pre-established selection criteria, would be posted in newspapers. Ultimately, the most qualified people would be appointed as returning officers.

There will be opposition to this from the start. I can already hear people saying that this cannot work and that it is impossible to make it work. I would submit that this process has been used in Quebec since 1980.

● (1120)

Some people in the House are tired of hearing about the situation in Quebec with regard to returning officers. When Quebec does something well, the immediate reaction is to say that it is no good and that it would not work. I am sorry, but since 1980, Quebec's returning officers have been selected according to an open and transparent process, using newspaper advertisements. Anyone can apply and there is no doubt about how they are appointed.

An open and transparent process where positions would be advertised in newspapers would support the free and democratic election of the people's representatives, in other words, the members.

Under this bill introduced by the Bloc Québécois, the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada could supervise the appointment of returning officers himself. However, I must clarify that we do not want the Chief Electoral Officer to make the appointments. His role would be to supervise the appointment of returning officers, who would be selected based on their competence, merit and qualifications to fulfill such duties. The bill introduced by the Bloc would give the Chief Electoral Officer powers similar to the ones his Quebec counterpart has had since 1980, as I mentioned earlier.

Quebec's electoral system is known around the world for its effectiveness and its democratic transparency. Again, a Quebec institution is showing its know-how. By passing this bill, the House of Commons would eliminate once and for all the ambiguity that undermines the authority of the Chief Electoral Officer in his relationship with returning officers. Under the current system, returning officers feel that they are accountable to the party in office, that is to those who appointed them, and not to the Chief Electoral Officer, who is the guardian of the democratic process.

I have been a member of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs since 2000. My colleague from Verchères—Les Patriotes was our party's chief whip at that time. On several occasions, we complained about irregularities in the electoral process, but the Chief Electoral Officer, Mr. Kingsley, responded that he had to work with the returning officers who were appointed because he did not have the authority to fire them since he was not

the one who had appointed them. Indeed, only the person who hires them has the right to fire them. This rule does not exist anywhere else in the area of labour relations or staffing. I know since I worked in that area for 16 years before becoming a member of Parliament. However, in this case, only the person who hires has the right to fire. The Chief Electoral Officer himself would like nothing better than to have the authority to make these appointments.

I do not have much time, but I would like to mention a few examples. At the last election, out of the 75 Bloc Québécois candidates in Quebec, 54 succeeded in getting elected. We did an inventory of some of the problems experienced at the last election. We had conducted the same exercise following the 2000, the 1997 and the 1993 elections. The problems that surface at every election are the same. This means that the existing system does not work. Citizens cannot be assured that returning officers are competent.

I will just mention one small example that occurred in my riding. At the last election, in Baie-Saint-Paul, which is located in the Charlevoix region, the returning officer did not have enough ballots for the advance polls. The act was amended regarding people who vote in advance polls.

● (1125)

Unlike before, in order to vote in advance, it is no longer necessary for a person to mention the reason why he or she will not be able to vote on election day. That requirement no longer exists. Some people think it still does, but it is no longer necessary to say why you will not be available. You simply have to say that you want to vote in advance. Of course, you have to identify yourself and provide some ID.

In Baie-Saint-Paul, before the June 28, 2004 election, from six to ten people went to vote in advance, because they were not going to be able to vote on June 28, either because they would be out of town or for some personal reason. Would you believe that these people were not able to cast their ballots, because the returning officer did not have enough ballots? This is as bad as it gets.

We discovered that there were returning officers in many ridings who either did not know the Canada Elections Act at all, or who did not know it well. I should also mention that the training provided to poll clerks and deputy returning officers is totally inadequate. It includes reading some manuals and watching a video cassette without any explanations.

Private Members' Business

It seems that June 28 is only a few days after June 24, which is la Fête nationale du Québec. The returning officer wanted the training to be on the evenings of June 23 and 24. While I do not wish to cite specific cases, I can say that this was in your very own riding, Mr. Speaker, Hull—Aylmer. In that riding, the returning officer, a good Liberal probably, wanted to train the deputy returning officers on the evenings of June 23 and 24, that is right in the midst of the Quebec national holiday celebrations. I am sure that you will agree with me that this is totally unacceptable. In another riding, it was discovered that the returning officer was the president of the Liberal association for the riding. It is time somebody woke up. This is Earth calling. The returning officer is the president of the Liberal riding association in Ahuntsic. Then one could raise the problem election staff had in getting appointments to see the returning officer. Or his refusal to provide a copy of the other candidates' nomination papers, although it is written in black and white in the law that each candidate is entitled to see the nomination papers of the other candidates.

Poll clerks have to be of the other party, that is the party that got the second highest number of votes in the last election, but in Beauce the returning officer mentioned to the director of the Bloc Québécois organization that the substitute clerks absolutely had to be Liberals. In yet another riding, the returning officer hired a poll clerk unable to read or write.

I am getting the sign that my time is nearly up. I am almost tempted to seek unanimous consent to continue until question period, because I have a whole lot of cases I could give. Since the member for Gatineau has just arrived, I would add that the returning officer wants to give training on the evenings of June 23 and 24. This goes for Gatineau as well as Hull—Aylmer, and no doubt a good Liberal has been appointed returning officer for Gatineau.

In conclusion, given the horror stories such as those—all chapter and verse—not to mention the others I will spare you concerning polls that were inaccessible, poorly equipped, poorly adapted to the purpose, which I could talk about until tomorrow—I am sure that my colleagues will vote in favour of Bill C-312.

• (1130)

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to sit on the same committee as my colleague for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord. I am often party to his very enthusiastic discourse. I congratulate him on it, especially since this bill is one I have no real objection to. I am proud to rise today to say so.

The Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs had the pleasure of hearing from the Chief Electoral Officer. We must not get too carried away on this point. People's reputations are at stake. Perhaps that does not disturb my Bloc colleagues, although I would find it unfortunate. I do not think that the bill of the member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord aims necessarily at character assassination, to use the very unfortunate anglophone expression. I have always tried to stand by this principle in the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

There are people involved. The appointment process was initiated long before I arrived. That said, some of these people are competent and work tirelessly for fairly low pay.

I have a question for my colleague from Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord. How does he interpret the Chief Electoral Officer's response to us that he would, in the end, keep almost all of the incumbent returning officers if he had the authority to hire or dismiss them? Can my colleague tell us today, from the analysis the Bloc appears to have done, how many of the 301 returning officers appointed in the 2004 election and of the 308 appointed in the following one he considers incompetent? Care must be taken to draw the line between transparency and competence. Having worked in labour law, like my colleague, I am trying to protect this principle.

There are very competent returning officers, although the process by which they are appointed may be open to criticism. I repeat here that I support transparency, but I do not want people who devote heart and soul to the job to be attacked. How many returning officers are considered incompetent, if figures are in fact available? Is the hon. member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord reassured that the Chief Electoral Officer would confirm most of the returning officers in their positions were such a bill passed?

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, of course, I am not able to provide the member with statistics on the 308 returning officers. However, I challenge her to tell me how many former or current candidates or members of the Bloc Québécois have been appointed to the position at the federal level until now. I am pleased to hear a colleague say that it is probably a matter of competence. In fact, the issue here is whether or not one owns a membership card of the Liberal Party.

Mr. Kingsley said that he would probably appoint all returning officers once again. So be it. However, I would be curious to see how he would react if he had the authority to appoint them and some cases were explained to him. Mr. Kingsley would be asked if it is normal that, in the riding of Honoré-Mercier, votes were cast in a seniors' home, where there was a scabies epidemic. Does a competent person act like that?

Let us not forget that the goal remains the free expression of the citizens' democratic choice. The returning officer is nothing more than the fiduciary of the citizens' democratic exercise. When I think that there was not enough ballots! In the riding of Verchères—Les Patriotes, people had to take the ferryboat to go voting. Does this help the election? I could give the example of 2000 in Saint-Laurent, on the Île-d'Orléans. I am the one who brought the returning officer and his assistant, Ms. Davidson, to the polling station. The vote was held in a hockey players' locker room, where they were six polling booths. One was able to see for whom the person in the next polling booth was voting. Is this free exercise? That is totally unacceptable. We need to clean up the process.

Private Members' Business

•(1135)

Hon. Raymond Simard (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Minister responsible for Official Languages and Minister responsible for Democratic Reform, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure today to speak at second reading of Bill C-312, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act (appointment of returning officers).

In this debate, allow me to stress how important the neutral administration of elections is to me.

For our electoral system to be perceived as truly fair and democratic, the individuals who run it must not only be honest, but also be perceived as free from partisan considerations.

In Canada, we enjoy an excellent electoral system which has proven itself over the years. Our system has been equipped with the necessary checks and balances for ensuring healthy electoral administration.

On election night, after the votes have been counted, Canadians take pride in the fact that our systems works, without having any serious doubt about the integrity of the process.

In some countries, that is not always the case. Doubt over possible political interference often mars the results and affects the legitimacy of the elected members.

It is in the context of good electoral administration that I want to address the bill under consideration. The bill amends the process for the appointment of returning officers, the local electoral administrators in every riding. The current process of appointment by the governor in council has a long history in Canada.

Although in the past being appointed returning officer was viewed as a political reward, the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing noted in 1991 that this attitude had changed over the years. The Lortie commission attributed this change in political culture to a real recognition by the parties of the need to ensure the proper functioning of elections at the local level.

The governing party, and every other party, has an interest in ensuring that the people chosen to run the election at the local level are competent, honest and impartial.

Some would say that the appearance of impartiality is just as important as being impartial in order for our voters to have confidence in our electoral system. That is perfectly fair. In Canada, that confidence rests on a solid exemplary tradition.

I am not aware of any specific instance in our modern electoral history where a returning officer has shown any bias, thereby influencing the outcome of an election. This is the result of a healthy democratic culture and of all the checks and balances in the Canada Elections Act, as I said earlier.

First, there are specific statutory prohibitions on partisanship, along with penalties including imprisonment. In my opinion, this constitutes a major deterrent for all returning officers who might consider assuming their responsibilities for partisan purposes. I am convinced that Elections Canada, when it trains new returning

officers, carries out its duty to advise new recruits of this violation of the Canada Elections Act.

Second, it is important to note, too, that a returning officer's office is staffed by elections officers, who are appointed by the returning officer from a list of names submitted by candidates from different political parties. For example, the revising agents are appointed from a list of names submitted by the political parties whose candidates came first and second respectively in that riding in the last election.

This requirement ensures that the activities of election officers will be subject to mutual surveillance, in what is a fundamentally adversarial process.

Third, I recently read with interest the report of the Chief Electoral Officer on the 38th general election regarding the creation of field liaison officers for that election. The Chief Electoral Officer indicated that these field liaison officers, who were appointed by his office, were responsible for, among other things, providing the returning officers with functional leadership, identifying problems at the electoral district level and helping the returning officers resolve them, apparently by providing coaching and personal assistance.

The Chief Electoral Officer also mentioned that, over the 36-day election period, field liaison officers identified a total of 164 risks and problems; all were resolved promptly by the Elections Canada executive committee. In my opinion, this innovation seems to ensure even tighter surveillance by Elections Canada of the actions of returning officers within each electoral district.

With increased surveillance, the likelihood of partisanship seems to be minimized. My comment on this recent innovation to Elections Canada leads me to my next point: my opinion on the need to change how returning officers are currently appointed.

•(1140)

As far as I am concerned, the system has proven itself.

The Lortie commission report made it quite clear that the appointment of returning officers by the governor in council "allows the selection of candidates having experience in the organization of federal elections at the local level who care about the democratic process".

No doubt there are ways to improve our system, but we have to be careful not to sacrifice a level of experience essential to the proper functioning of elections, in order to improve already satisfactory impartiality.

This experience can be found not among electors having no experience in the field, but rather among people who have knocked on doors and who have a practical experience of the electoral activities at the local level.

I am sure that after participating in an election only a year ago, all of my colleagues will agree that somebody who has no other experience of the polling station than that of an elector who only has to wait in line for five minutes, take a ballot paper, go in the booth to mark it and place it in the box after, cannot understand the skills required of a returning officer.

Private Members' Business

This is the person who will be responsible for choosing and training the returning officers in the riding, rather than asking somebody who has worked as a candidate representative during the 14 hours or so that the polling station is open.

To conclude, I would like to reiterate that the efficiency of our electoral administration is of the utmost importance.

It is essential that we thoroughly consider each and every change we might want to make to a system that works, in order to avoid any unexpected negative effects.

In this regard, I am afraid the suggested alternative is not really an improvement, although it might seem to be one on paper.

For this reason, I will not be supporting the bill.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord for his excellent bill.
[English]

This is a very good bill. The proposed bill brings to a conclusion a process of gradual improvement to our electoral law which has made the electoral law of Canada, in most respects, one of the most admired in the world and deservedly one of the most admired in the world.

I want to run through some of the things that I think are good about our current law. The hon. parliamentary secretary has already run through some of these things as well, but I will add to his list.

It seems to me that the various abuses that used to be practised by parties of all stripes in elections have gradually been stripped away by various measures we have adopted over the past century. It started with the secret ballot, which eliminated the possibility of watching voters and then bribing them and paying them off afterwards, and the introduction of counterfoils, which ensured that ballots could not be placed in the hand of a voter by an outside agent already marked. That was an important innovation. The presence of scrutineers from all candidates ensured that improperly marked ballots could be set aside and that properly marked ballots could not be set aside as if they were improperly marked.

The ability to engage in judicial recounts where there were close elections was an important feature we had that was very positive in our country. The presence in every polling location of a deputy returning officer and the poll clerk, appointed by the two parties that did the best in that riding in the previous election, ensured that funny business could be kept to a minimum or, in fact, virtually eliminated. Having run in two elections, I can say that this part of the system functioned very well indeed.

I should note as well that the Chief Electoral Officer of the country is appointed essentially until the age of 65 and can only be replaced for essentially the abuse of his office. That also is a good system that works well.

It seems odd to me, therefore, that with our Chief Electoral Officer selected in the proper manner and every other person, right down to the scrutineers, deputy returning officers and poll clerks, elected in the correct manner or chosen in a manner that is not subject to abuse, we have one position that remains essentially a patronage

appointment, an order in council appointment, one which is always held by the party in power at the time, it being of course the returning officer for each riding. This bill seeks to remedy that situation. I think it is an excellent idea.

The question of whether or not returning officers have ever acted in a partisan manner or in an abusive manner is not the problem. I think it does occur from time to time but in general, that is not the problem. The problem of confidence however is widespread. My hon. colleague, the member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, pointed to a number of spectacular examples, but I can think of a few examples that have come to my own attention. In fact, a few have occurred in my own riding in the last election where I thought that things could have been done a great deal better had someone with a greater and more impressive set of professional skills been put in place. Let me give some examples of this.

The improper labelling of many hundreds, possibly thousands, of voter cards, so that the cards were sent to people, advising them to vote in the wrong riding. This occurred and many cases were brought to my attention. In some cases, people were told to vote in an advanced poll in one riding and in an election day poll in another riding. This was not just from my own riding, but also in some of the surrounding ridings. I know this because people came and said that they were confused. They were told to vote in my riding although they did not live in it, or, they were told to vote outside the riding even though they did live in it.

The improper location of polling stations was a huge problem in my own constituency. In one case a polling location was located in a spot where people living in a place called White Lake in the northeast corner of my constituency could not vote in the proposed location without leaving the riding and engaging in an hour-long drive to re-enter the riding.

There was a road connecting the polling station with the location where the residents were voting. The trouble is that the road, which is called the California Trail, is a little less impressive than its name suggests. It is actually a snowmobile trail and impassable in summer. This would have been known by someone who had proper local knowledge. However, because it was a partisan appointment made at the last second, the returning officer did not know. She had to go out and investigate, and get to know the back roads of the riding. We had a problem, which she in all fairness tried to correct when it was drawn to her attention. These are some of the examples.

● (1145)

I have another example from my own constituency during the last election. At one location in the riding, where many people went to vote because it was the traditional spot where they had voted, they found that they were not on the list because their cards had been labelled incorrectly. The returning officer, despite warnings from my official agent, had not provided adequate forms at that polling station to allow people to sign in. When the forms ran out, the deputy returning officer at the station was unable to sign people in.

Private Members' Business

Some of the voters were so upset at being told that they effectively were being deprived of their franchise they blockaded the entrance to the polling station. This had the consequence that other people could not vote. The police were called in to open up the voting station. In the meantime, the situation was resolved only because my campaign people went out and printed up some of the necessary forms to allow people to continue voting. We then had to bill Elections Canada for that and it reimbursed us, but that should not have happened. There are many other examples and I am just providing a few of the ones that have come to my attention.

Therefore, I think there are a number of solutions that would occur simply because we would have professional people working at this key job instead of the political appointees we now have.

I want to draw to the attention of the sponsor of the bill to three minor problems that I see with this very good legislation. First, it seems to me that there ought to be something in the bill that allows for an appointment on very short notice, if someone, for example, a returning officer, who does not meet the residence requirements laid out in the bill should for example fall ill or otherwise become unable to carry out his or her functions within the period immediately preceding a potential election or during a writ period. I think that could be added in. I suspect that the sponsor of the bill would be very sympathetic toward that.

Second, it seems to me that there might be merit to having a review of the conduct of each returning officer conducted after each election with each of the candidates who participated in the election, or their official agents could send in some of form of review sheet to the Chief Electoral Officer, so that the Chief Electoral Officer could sift through and see whether or not the returning officer in each of the ridings was performing up to scratch.

Finally, in subclause 24(4) of the new bill there is a suggestion that returning officers positions become vacant if the returning officer dies, resigns or ceases to reside in the electoral district. It seems to me that these people could move from the electoral district to an adjoining electoral district where they could still conduct their affairs as returning officers without losing their position, given that the bill anticipates in an earlier section that someone can be a returning officer if they are domiciled in an adjacent electoral district but able to perform the functions of a returning officer as satisfactorily as if they were domiciled in the electoral district for which their appointment was made. It seems to me that this slight change would allow them a little more freedom of movement without losing their office and without in any way harming the general intent of the bill.

I will conclude by pointing out that the general tone of this proposed law is very much in keeping with the direction in which the Conservative Party is moving. I want to read from one of the policies of the Conservative Party. Policy No. 6 states:

A Conservative Government will ensure that senior officers such as the Auditor General, Chief Electoral Officer, Comptroller General, Ethics Commissioner, Information Commissioner, and Privacy Commissioner will be appointed by Parliament and report to it.

The idea of ensuring that non-parliamentary and government control is removed over appointments of importance to the functioning of our democracy and of the openness for our system

is very important to the Conservative Party. The bill, as I say, fits in with our policy.

This is an excellent law. I would hope that sometime within the next year a Conservative government will be able to introduce and follow through on a version of this legislation.

● (1150)

Hon. Ed Broadbent (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am rising to support this bill introduced by my colleague from the Bloc. Its principle has been long supported by my party.

As has already been said, we have now what is really a legacy from a political past that has been much too much under the control of partisan decision making. One of the great progressive tendencies since the 19th century, as a matter of fact, not only in Canada but in England and other developed democracies, has been to professionalize a lot of the activity that was once totally under the control of partisan politics.

This, in terms of the administration of our elections, is one of the few remaining anomalies in this democratization process and it is time we got rid of it.

I must say I was surprised by what the parliamentary secretary was saying. I do not know if he was speaking as a private individual or for the government on this matter. He was saying that there is really no need to change because there has not been some colossal fiasco. To say the least, that is not very good reasoning.

We have made all kinds of other changes in the past because we believe that a public function, which should be transparent and accountable, almost by definition has to be devoid of partisan political control. Because if something goes wrong, then it is too easy to blame the fact partisan political activity led to the fault in the first place. It is such an obvious change that is due to be made to our system. The Chief Electoral Officer himself has called for professionalizing this and taking these decisions away from partisan politicians.

As someone who has run in eight elections, seven in my hometown of Oshawa and one more recently here in Ottawa, I have not run into difficulties in the electoral process itself, but as our Bloc colleague has pointed out, with our Conservative colleague following suit, there have been a number of problems associated with a decision making process that is less than fully professionalized.

Even if incompetence has been revealed, it has not been due to the fact that a Liberal has appointed a Liberal or a Conservative has appointed a Conservative but because the person was incompetent. That in itself is reason to professionalize the whole process: to make it public, to have stated criteria for the job, and to have men and women apply for the job and have someone quite independent of the government of the day making the decision about the hiring, and subsequently, if that is necessary, the firing.

Private Members' Business

I will conclude my brief comments by saying that the New Democrats strongly support this measure. Since his party has talked about the democratic deficit, we remain astonished at this point that our Liberal colleague is not supporting this bill. Three parties in the House have spoken for it. I hope that when the vote takes place a substantial majority of the members of the House of Commons will vote for it.

• (1155)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak in my turn to the bill put forward by my colleague, which seeks to enable the Chief Electoral Officer to appoint or to remove returning officers following an open and transparent process which will have made it possible to assess the competence, the merit and the skills to fulfill their duties of the people to be appointed.

I think there is no issue, topic or theme which allows us to discover more clearly the extent to which the current government is showing bad faith and duplicity in its pretense of wanting to reform the democratic institutions in such a way as to make them more valid or acceptable in the eyes of our fellow citizens who, for some years, have been exhibiting an increasing level of cynicism towards political institutions.

This government has taken upon itself to reform a number of things at the parliamentary level. The current Prime Minister, when he was barely running for the leadership of his party, was already floating the idea of parliamentary reform aimed at giving more powers to members of Parliament. He announced a plan to give MPs the power to appoint judges so as to avoid partisan appointments. We now find out that on this issue, he stubbornly follows the example of his predecessor and want to retain partisan appointments to returning officers positions.

We know very well that this government is desperately trying to separate itself from its Siamese twin, that is, the previous Chrétien government, which we are learning bit by bit was steeped in scandal, corruption and nepotism. It is understandable under the circumstances that the present government is anxious to do all it can to detach itself, separate itself, differentiate itself, from the previous government.

Yet these two are true Siamese twins, and cannot be separated because they share a number of vital organs. Some key players in the previous government are in the present one, and not just on the back benches either. They are in the ministerial seats.

As I said, this matter of returning officers gives us a clearer picture of the duplicity and bad faith of this government. I will give an example of something that happened quite recently in my riding of Verchères—Les Patriotes. Unfortunately, the woman who was appointed returning officer before the 1997 election recently passed away. I will take this opportunity to express my condolences to her family. When I learned of this—and moreover I was not notified but had to seek the information out myself—I took action immediately, given the imminence of a federal election. I went to see the deputy house leader to tell him that the returning officer in my riding had died and to ask whether he wanted me to provide names of highly qualified candidates who could assume those duties. To my great

surprise, he announced to me that he had already submitted a name to Cabinet and that the matter would be settled shortly. In fact, the nomination took place just a few days ago.

In answer to the parliamentary secretary or to the member for Gatineau, nobody has ever said in this House, even on our side, that all returning officers were incompetent. Some are quite competent indeed. What we are saying though is that we do not necessarily choose the most competent ones because there are no call for nominations, we are not getting all the possible candidates for the position and friends of members of the government party are the ones being asked. It is nothing but cronyism, patronage and partisan politics.

The parliamentary secretary was saying earlier that the best experience one could have was to have been a candidate representative for a whole election day, from the opening of polls until the counting of ballots at the end of the day, saying that this was a real experience.

• (1200)

It is of course a fine experience, but the returning officers should not all have gotten their experience on the same side. Otherwise, if this side has a tendency to foster bad habits in its election workers, odds are that these bad habits will be found in all the returning officers.

It is, of course, a relevant experience that has to be taken into consideration. However, we have to be able to choose—from among all of those who have had such an experience, no matter which party they worked for—the ones who are most competent for the position.

In his report following the 37th general election, the Chief Electoral Officer recommended, among other things, that returning officers be appointed by the Chief Electoral Officer based on merit, that new returning officers be appointed for a 10 year renewable term and that the Chief Electoral Officer have the authority to dismiss returning officers on grounds of incompetence or unsatisfactory performance. Following the 38th general election, he reiterated this recommendation. This is nothing new; the Lortie commission recommended the same thing back in 1990. I might add for the benefit of the parliamentary secretary that, on this issue, the commission said one thing and then the opposite. The Chief Electoral Officer had made the same recommendation following the 35th and 36th general elections. It did not just occur to him out of the blue that this would be a good idea. Based on his extensive experience, he came to the conclusion, especially now, that such a change was necessary.

I remember hearing the Chief Electoral Officer say that, in discussions with some of his foreign counterparts, he was embarrassed to mention how returning officers are appointed in Canada. Understandably so, because this country, Canada, which boasts about being a model of democracy for the entire world, still has a few skeletons in its closet in this respect.

Private Members' Business

As a member of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, when I meet colleagues from around the world, I have some difficulty telling them with a straight face that our senators are appointed by the Prime Minister, and not elected. While most are extremely competent and acting in good faith, the fact remains that senators are appointed on a partisan basis. The same is true of returning officers.

The parliamentary secretary said earlier that there had never been any problems, except minor glitches here and there. We could, however, list a number of serious problems that the Chief Electoral Officer himself raised before the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs on October 26. He said, and this is no minor matter:

I know of about 10 cases of insubordination, three problems involving conflict of interest, about 14 problems of incompetence, some 10 cases involving a lack of computer skills, which is a different area.

—a returning officer hired 10 members of her family, which is a violation of the ethics code. ... a returning officer kept his position in an association despite the fact that this created a conflict of interests... a returning officer put himself in a conflict of interest by agreeing to work in the riding office of a provincial member of the legislature.

One of them told me that if I was not pleased, he was going to resign in the middle of the election. That is insubordination.

That is what the Chief Returning Officer said. He also said:

—I received two letters of resignation from two returning officers. One told me that he had informed his local party association before the people there asked him to resign. The other one told me that he had informed the local association and that it had identified two possible successors and was going to review their candidacy further. He also said that he had defined the roles and responsibilities of a returning officer for the association, so that it could appoint an appropriate candidate.

Appropriate under what criteria? Those of the riding association? It makes no sense. That is scandalous.

I conclude with another case the Chief Electoral Officer reported:

—a returning officer... accepted nomination papers without checking a single name, because he did not want to be late for an appointment. In the case of all other candidates, all 100 signatures were checked.

• (1205)

While, as the member for Gatineau has said, we cannot conclude that all returning officers are incompetent or partisan, it appears that a number of them are.

A stop must be put to that situation and people hired following a transparent and open public competition, where people's experience, competence and ability to do the job can be assessed. Let us put an end to this system of nepotism and modernize Canada's electoral system.

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak on Bill C-312 which proposes an amendment to the Canada Elections Act to establish a new process for the appointment of returning officers.

Returning officers are currently appointed by the governor in council under section 24 of the act and those appointments are tabled before the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

The proposed amendment would transfer that power to the Chief Electoral Officer. I want to make it clear now that I do not support the amendment, principally for two reasons.

First, I am concerned about the erosion of power of the House of Commons itself, particularly in the electoral process and I am not convinced that increasing professionalization of our system helps the electoral process at the riding level.

Second, I want to make the point that I do not believe the case has been proven, that there are in fact sufficient reasons or causes for this very important change. It should be studied very carefully, as we usually do in this place, before we jump from one situation which at least we know to another situation which we do not know.

As members of the House understand more than anyone else, because we have all been candidates in elections, returning officers play an essential and invaluable role in our electoral system. They are on the very front lines at election time and no electoral process would be successful without the essential contributions of these people.

As set out in the act, returning officers are responsible under the general direction of the Chief Electoral Officer for the preparation and conduct of an election in his or her electoral district. Behind the scenes in every election there are literally thousands of election workers and returning officers are responsible for coordinating the activities of these workers.

There is no question that the demands on returning officers are tremendous and require a broad range of abilities, including material, human and financial resources management, contract negotiations, public and media relations and office automation, to name but a few. I would mention another, which is knowledge of the local region of the riding that is concerned, knowledge not simply of the political process in general but of the political process as it functions, let us say in a very large rural area or in a concentrated urban area.

Returning officers are not left on their own to carry out these tasks. They are not simply appointed and then left there. The Chief Electoral Officer of Elections Canada provides them with training and access to a wide range of materials and software. I have heard that our Chief Electoral Officer is very proud of his training programs and I have no doubt our returning officers are fully prepared to assume their responsibilities.

My colleague from the Bloc mentioned the view of this from overseas. I would argue that in the vast majority of countries in the world, it is not possible to professionalize positions of this type, particularly to professionalize them so people have these jobs for years and years and can work with volunteers and the limited resources in those countries. It is in those countries that they admire the way we train our returning officers to work with volunteers.

Government Orders

I will go back to my point about the need has yet to be demonstrated. In my personal experience, and it is the riding of Peterborough where I have the greatest experience, I have been active in politics provincially and federally for a good number of years so I have known a number of returning officers. They are highly qualified and do excellent work. To my knowledge, there have been very few cases over the years where these individuals have been unable to carry out their responsibilities, with the backing of Elections Canada as I described.

While I have worked with other electoral officers provincially, in my case federally, the person concerned was appointed before my time. We are talking about partisan appointments, appointed long before my time. My riding was a Conservative riding for many years before it became the Liberal riding, which it is today and which it will remain.

There are very few documented problems of inadequate performance by returning officers. I would argue that the numbers, and we have heard a few examples here, would be no less if these people were in some way professionally appointed. To have them appointed by somebody in Ottawa who is not answerable to the House of Commons and to know the situation in Peterborough, or in Saint Boniface or wherever else really strikes me as a tendency which members of the House should be working against rather than in favour of giving some authority out into the regions.

•(1210)

Another point that has been made, apart from the alleged concerns about general incompetence which has not been demonstrated, is that somehow these individuals are exercising partisan views simply because they are appointed by the governor in council. As I have mentioned, the appointments are tabled with procedure and House affairs. The House of Commons deals with these things rather than some individual who is appointed for life to the position of chief electoral officer.

•(1215)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired, and the item is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AGENCY OF CANADA FOR THE REGIONS OF QUEBEC ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-9, an act to establish the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, as reported with amendments from the committee.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (for the Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec and Minister responsible for the Francophonie) moved that the bill as amended be concurred in.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): In my opinion the nays have it.

And more than five members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): Call in the members.

And the bells having rung.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): At the request of the chief government whip, the vote is deferred until the end of government orders tomorrow.

* * *

[*Translation*]

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT ACT

The House resumed from April 6, 2005, consideration of the motion that Bill C-23, an act to establish the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development and to amend and repeal certain related Acts, be read the third time and passed.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Saint-Maurice—Champlain has 18 minutes remaining.

Mr. Marcel Gagnon (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak on this bill. In fact, I am doubly pleased, since this is probably one of the last speeches I will make in the House. If the rumours prove to be true, there could be an election very soon. It is time for me to throw in the towel. I will be moving on and going home after 25 years of relatively active political life.

In all those years as a member of this House, I have had the opportunity to defend various files. Among others, the one that affected me most and into which I threw all my time and energy, the one of which I am most proud, is the guaranteed income supplement for seniors.

Government Orders

The House will recall that, when we took on this issue affecting the poorest seniors in Canada and Quebec, most had been deprived of the guaranteed income supplement to which they were entitled. The Bloc Québécois travelled around Quebec meeting with seniors and showing them the extent to which they had been deprived of an essential income. I met people with all kinds of conditions and I was surprised that the government had so little concern for the most vulnerable members of our society.

When we talk about economically disadvantaged people, we often refer to poverty and to children living in poverty. Indeed, it is sad to see a child who is suffering from poverty because his or her parents are poor. And these parents are often poor because, again, the government is not fulfilling its duties.

Let us take, for example, the employment insurance account. Instead of paying benefits to workers who lose their jobs, the government has used these funds to reduce its debt. Therefore, it is not surprising to see children living in poverty, because the money is not going to families.

When I see young people living in poverty, it affects me. But I keep thinking that there is always hope and love. Some change could occur. Some miracle could happen.

However, when a person has worked for society throughout his life, has raised six, seven or eight children, and is deprived of his due in the twilight of his life, it is a rather painful thing to see. I remember the day when the hon. member for Sherbrooke and I were supposed to meet someone. We were not able to do it, because that person was dying. However, we met the family and found out that, after raising a family of eight children, that woman, who was 88, had spent her senior years with an annual income of \$6,000, and when she died, the government collected \$90,000 that was owed.

When we see such things, we can only fight tooth and nail for these people. I can say that we met with some success. The number of elderly who fall through the cracks is still too high, but it has diminished significantly. The government has improved its way of informing the elderly. However, a lot remains to be done.

I would have liked to leave politics only after managing to convince the government that it must pay retroactively the people that it has—I will not use the term “robbed”, because it is too harsh, although I really wonder if it is—fooled and misled. Indeed, the government did not do all it could to locate these people, simply because they are economically disadvantaged.

We often meet elderly people who do not have a good education, and there are even well-educated people who, following some disease or a stroke—I, along with all the hon. members who helped me with this issue, met some—are often no longer able to get the information they need. In my view, if we make it complicated to get the information, we are guilty, if not of robbing people, of acting very irresponsibly towards society's oldest members.

This matter is not closed. Yet, I wish, among other things, that the government would continue to manage the country for some time, if only perhaps to close this matter and to pass this legislation now before the House, which would force the government to pay retroactively the people whom it has swindled.

● (1220)

Instead of solving these problems, what does the government do? It introduces legislation like this. The federal government takes pleasure in complicating what could be simple. Why simplify things when it is so simple to complicate them? We need to get closer to the people, to provide better service, to give more information, not to create another department that will add 14,000 more public servants. And why? To spend money within the government, to expand the whole thing, to increase the size of this government instead of providing services to those waiting for them.

The seniors' issue is somewhat a part of this. Instead of adding 14,000 public servants, the government could perhaps have taken the billion dollars and more that this will cost to pay out the \$3 billion retroactively to seniors who are entitled to receive it. In the last six years, the federal government has increased the number of public servants by 49,000. Here, it wants to add 14,000 more, which means almost 60,000 public servants. The total payroll is about \$9 billion a year. Yet, it would be so simple to respect jurisdictions. This bill infringes on provincial jurisdictions. I am helpless before a government that really does not want to improve things.

If you can get your hands on the article in *La Presse* from three weeks ago, you should read it. In it, Mr. Castonguay, the former Quebec health minister and a Liberal federalist, was saying how much the federal government has missed the mark since the 1960s. In trying to get closer to Quebec, it has pushed it further away. It would have been so easy just to respect Quebec and its jurisdictions. Just read the piece by Mr. Castonguay, a Liberal federalist, in which he explains how badly you have been missing the mark since the 1960s. You are still missing the mark.

I had the opportunity to serve as an MNA in Quebec City and I worked with Mr. Parizeau, a finance minister recognized throughout Canada. He was a smart man. One day, he was to give a speech in my riding at a meeting of the chamber of commerce. Since I was unable to attend, my wife agreed to go and sit at the head table with Mr. Parizeau. This intimidated her immensely. She said she was not really sure what to do, that she was shy. I told her it was simple, all she had to do was ask a few questions and let him take it from there. I assured her the meal would go very well and that she would learn a great deal.

At one point during the evening she said to Mr. Parizeau, it must not be easy to run a country. Mr. Parizeau said he was surprised to hear a mother say that, because it is mothers who run the country. They are the ones who, in the past, took the household income and divvied it up according to each member's responsibilities and plans. It is simple, you have your budget and you allot a certain amount for education, leisure, food and housing. That is how a country should be run. We should go back to the basics and use common sense.

Government Orders

If the federal government had done that, then they might not have increased the number of public servants by 59,000 over the past six years only to duplicate provincial jurisdictions and services. Health, education and municipalities are provincial responsibilities. According to Mr. Parizeau, it is simple and very logical. We do not even need any experts. Out of its little budget, Quebec needs x amount of billions of dollars for the health system to work. The same goes for Quebec and the provinces who need a certain number of billions of dollars for education and for every area of need.

However, it currently costs a fortune in administration alone. Money is wasted because we have too much administration.

●(1225)

One need look no further than the sponsorship scandal. As René Lévesque would say, it is not one specific scandal but an atmosphere of scandal, and shameless waste everywhere despite crying needs.

Seniors did not need this legislation; they merely needed to be listened to. I feel we owe it to them to admit they have been fleeced, to have the honesty to admit that they were not given the information they needed and that steps were not taken to see that they could get that information.

One of the parish priests in my riding said that if it is not dishonest, it is at the very least totally irresponsible. That money is not ours. It belongs to the poorest members of society, particularly older women. They generally live longer than men, with a life expectancy of 83 years at present. So they are the ones who suffer the most from poverty and yet they are the ones who have raised families and made our society what it is today. This is completely irresponsible and immoral.

It would be appropriate to add some more public servants rather than putting the money into the big government machinery. I do not see the advantage of making that machinery still bigger and still more complicated, when there are responsibilities in our system that need to be divided. The system is not that badly designed, if there were the will to apply it properly.

We are not in favour of this bill, of course, because it is unnecessary and because it encroaches onto provincial jurisdiction. I would have liked to have felt that my time in politics had enabled me to make things better. If there is one area in which I can say that I have some satisfaction with what we have accomplished together, it is the seniors file. It would be so easy to make this country work better. I know, however, that we will not achieve that goal.

I can say, however, that this was my primary objective when I entered politics, even though I would have preferred it did not have to be done, with the federal government deciding to govern properly.

Perhaps Quebec need not become sovereign, but we can see from Castonguay and many others that the only way out with everything we want—with our money, which means not having to beg, and no more federal scandals—is through Quebec's sovereignty.

Having worked with various governments, I am convinced that Quebec would do a better job if it could govern itself. We would not have to encroach on anyone's jurisdiction. Quebec would be perfectly capable of administering itself. Quebec is promised a great future. René Lévesque once said of Quebecers that they are

something of a great people. I can assure the hon. members that Quebecers will become a great people with a wonderful, beautiful country before my days are over.

I worked with René Lévesque, as well as with Gérald Godin, Pauline Julien, Camille Laurin. I have had the pleasure, since the 1960s, of working with the people, including Jacques Parizeau and others, who made up the “équipe du tonnerre” in those days. There was Jean Lesage, and his master of our own house theme. That was a truly extraordinary team.

Then came Lévesque's team, preceded by another team advocating sovereignty-association, or rather independence. Then there were the days of sovereignty-association with René Lévesque. I am convinced that there will soon be another referendum. You have amply proven to us to what extent you have trampled our rights. In 1995, you made us lose not only hope but also our name, our reputation. You—

●(1230)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): I remind the hon. member that he must address his remarks to the Chair.

Mr. Marcel Gagnon: I will be pleased to do so, Mr. Speaker.

Because of the sponsorship scandal, we lost much more than a referendum. We also lost our reputation in the eyes of many Canadians. They say this is normal, this is the way people do politics in Quebec. But that is not true. If there is one place where measures are being taken to clean up politics, it is Quebec.

Mr. Lévesque worked tirelessly on this issue and Quebecers are able to be involved in politics, while respecting everyone's interests. However, when money is taken to voluntarily buy people's consciences, as was done, this is confirmation to us that the only way that Quebec can really be its own master in the future is by achieving sovereignty. As far as I am concerned, this should happen as soon as possible, and I will be very pleased to participate in the process.

●(1235)

[English]

Hon. Peter Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to what my colleague had to say and perhaps I should remind people watching this on television or perhaps some of the people in the gallery what the topic is. Bill C-23 would officially establish the new Department of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. It is one of two departments that would replace the old, huge federal department of HRDC. The other side of this legislation is Bill C-22 which would set up the new Department of Social Development Canada.

Government Orders

The idea is to make the federal system more effective by delivering, for example, employment insurance and training programs by one designated department, HRSD. Other programs, some of which were mentioned by my colleague, would be delivered by Social Development Canada. For example, the Canada pension plan and the child care program would be delivered by Social Development Canada. The purpose is to make the federal government more effective and more efficient.

I can well understand that my colleague, who addressed this very little, has no real interest in the federal government. He talked about the waste of money. One of the purposes of the bill is to take a large, rambling department and make it more effective. In the old department there were five different privacy codes. If a person applied for something in one part of the department, it required different privacy information than in other parts. That has been changed now to one privacy code, which the Privacy Commissioner has commended.

My colleague mentioned the delivery of services to the elderly. Instead of the Canada pension plan being all mixed in with employment insurance, it would be on its own delivering pensions, along with the associated programs, such as the disability programs. As well, the new seniors' secretariat will be there and it will be more effective.

I know my colleague may not be interested in this, but the purpose of the bill is to make the federal government more effective and less expensive, not the other way around.

The other thing about this which puzzles me when I hear my colleague talk is that this is not something that the government has developed and brought out of thin air. This was unanimously recommended by a standing committee of this House and was unanimously approved by this House, including the Bloc, recommending that the old Department of HRDC be divided in some appropriate fashion. That is what, for the past many months, we have been debating here.

The Bloc members were onside. Like us, they felt that it would be better. Not just thinking now of nationalism but thinking of the clients, the people of Canada with whom we deal, it would be more effective for the people of Canada, people in need, people on employment insurance and people with disabilities, to set up this new department so that it would be more effective. I am puzzled. Why has the Bloc changed its mind on this having supported the original suggestion that the former department be divided? When did they change their minds?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Gagnon: Mr. Speaker, I am still puzzled. We have just seen an example. It looks like we always need a bigger machine to provide services. If we only respected the areas of jurisdiction, we would not have to increase the number of public servants. It is quite simple.

It has been suggested that an independent EI fund be created. Employment insurance does not concern you, except for regulations. Again, the federal government is not putting any money into the EI fund, but it is taking money out of it. Do not tell me that it is because we lack services that we are not giving EI benefits to a worker who

loses his job. About 39% of the workers who contribute to employment insurance can expect to receive benefits if they are let go. The federal government took the rest of the money. What will an extra 14,000 public servants do? There is simply no will to provide services to the workers who qualify for employment insurance.

Why was there no new department for seniors? There were 270,000 seniors who were not receiving the guaranteed income supplement. That is now down to 100,000 people. No new department was created. The process was rationalized, forms were simplified and proper information was given. Instead of making things more complicated, they simplified them. They have shown a willingness to provide the necessary services. With 60,000 more public servants in the last five years and an increase of more than \$9 billion in salaries for the Government of Canada, services are getting worse, not better.

• (1240)

[*English*]

Hon. Jerry Pickard (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as my hon. colleague pointed out a few moments ago, there is a need for reorganization, for setting new structures and for bringing in efficiencies in all government departments. The federal government has been striving for a very long time to deliver services to Canadians in as efficient a way as possible.

As my colleague pointed out, every party in the House, the Bloc, the Conservatives, the NDP, and the Liberals, unanimously supported in committee the restructuring and reorganization of that department. Regardless of how one looks upon the situation the member is presenting this morning, it is very clear that the movement was toward efficiencies and changing some of the archaic means by which things are done. Often as departments expand, we need to look at better efficiencies.

I understand from talking with my colleague that one of the panel groups that has been suggested in employment insurance is now a three person group. My colleague across the way was talking about expanding it to a 17 member group. Going from 3 to 17 is a loss in efficiency. I can understand that the federal government looks at the operations in a much more important way, making efficiencies, downsizing where possible and making sure that appropriate facilities are delivered to people.

I am going to ask exactly the same question that my colleague asked. When did the member's party change its mind and for what reason? How can it justify walking away from an agreement it made with all the other parties in the House?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Gagnon: Madam Speaker, we never changed our mind. In fact, we have always thought that the way the federal government works is bad for Quebec. It grabs more and more money, but never seems able to give it back.

Government Orders

Indeed, this weekend, the member for St. Hyacinthe said that the fiscal balance should not occur by pieces; it should occur globally. The federal government must give back to the provinces what is rightfully theirs. The Liberals have complicated things. Do they believe that if there was an independent employment insurance fund, it would be more complicated? It would be less complicated. They would not be able to take money from the fund instead of providing benefits to workers.

When I toured Quebec about the guaranteed income supplement, I received a nice letter from Jane Stewart, who was the minister at the time. She wrote me that she had given all she could, that she had improved the information in order to be able to give more, that she had given us all that we had asked for, but that there was only one thing that she could not give us: it was retroactivity.

Do we need a department to offer retroactivity? No, we need honesty. All they have to do is admit that that money is not theirs. It is not by establishing a department, by making the administration bigger, that we will have money to offer retroactivity. We do not need a department to offer retroactivity. And Mrs. Stewart's letter proves it. It is the same thing with employment insurance.

Since my time is up, I will conclude by saying that, in terms of employment insurance, it is not true that we need a department to improve the system; we only need to take it out of the hands of the Liberals.

• (1245)

[*English*]

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I greatly appreciate this opportunity to speak to the legislation to establish the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development. I am proud to express my support for this legislation which will help the government act on its vision for a strong Canada with a thriving 21st century economy.

Our goal is to see opportunities available to every citizen who wants to learn and to develop the skills and flexibility so essential for success in our new economy. This is a vision in which no one is left out or left behind as a result of particular challenges they may face. We value the talents and abilities of all our citizens and want to support Canadians in realizing their potential, whatever their age or employment situation.

We see this commitment reflected in the legislation which is clearly articulated particularly by the mandate of the minister of HRSD and the new department. This mandate relates to improving the standard of living and the quality of life of all Canadians by promoting a highly skilled and mobile workforce and an efficient and inclusive labour market.

In my remarks today I will be pleased to demonstrate for hon. members how the new department directly supports this goal.

One way is through the active measures under the employment insurance program which HRSD delivers in partnership with the provinces and territories and community organizations across the country. In 2003-04 the department assisted close to 700,000 Canadians through EI program components, such as the employment assistance services, job creation partnership, and self-employment assistance. By helping Canadians to prepare for, find and keep jobs,

these EI programs are enabling our citizens to achieve the personal security and well-being that results from fulfilling, sustainable employment.

The comprehensive EI program supports Canadians' well-being in other ways. HRSD delivers employment insurance to Canadians who are temporarily unemployed to help them bridge the period between jobs. In addition, the maternity and parental benefits under the EI program make it easier for parents to concentrate on the health and well-being of their baby.

The employment insurance compassionate care benefit is also delivered by employees of the department. By providing six weeks of EI benefits, this measure helps to ease the stress faced by Canadians who must choose between their jobs and caring for a family member who is gravely ill.

Many members of the House will also be familiar with the achievements of the department's youth employment strategy. This strategy, which helps young people between 15 and 30 obtain valuable work experience, is active on many fronts in communities across this country, including my riding of Davenport.

I spoke earlier of the government's commitment to assisting Canadians who encounter obstacles to obtaining employment. The youth employment strategy has programs specifically designed to assist young people who are experiencing particular difficulties in entering the labour market so that they can forge a brighter, productive future.

One of the obstacles many young people face today is their lack of literacy skills. The department is also at work on this important front, in partnership with the provinces, territories, business, labour, educational institutions and literacy organizations.

The government recognizes the crucial role of literacy skills as the foundation for all learning and for participation in our knowledge based economy and society. Literacy skills are linked to work skills, health and self-esteem. These skills play a key role in ensuring that Canada continues to be productive, competitive and economically secure.

Through its national literacy secretariat, HRSD invests close to \$30 million in literacy partnerships each year. The goal of these partnerships is to find innovative ways of improving the literacy skills of Canadians of all ages in the home, in the workplace and in the community.

Committed partnerships are the essence of the department's programs. It is by working with and through a host of partners, including the provincial and territorial governments, business, labour unions, aboriginal organizations, training institutions, financial institutions and sector councils, that the department achieves its objectives.

On that note, I would like to emphasize that the legislation articulates that the new department will continue to work within its jurisdiction, and operate as it has always done with other governments. Indeed, the department has a long history of cooperation with the provincial and territorial governments as evidenced by the labour market development agreements in place across the country.

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•(1250)

Continuing this cooperation, the department will be working closely with its provincial and territorial partners to find new ways of enhancing the access and affordability of post-secondary education. We want to ensure that all Canadians can pursue learning opportunities throughout their lives.

Creating a culture of lifelong learning is the precondition for building a quality workforce for the new economy. Starting in the earliest years, we must give Canadians access to opportunities to develop their skills and fulfill their potential as individuals.

For example, to enable more parents to start saving early for their children's post-secondary education, the department is working to improve low income families' uptake of registered education savings plans and Canada education savings grants. These efforts include the innovative Canada learning bond and enhancements to the Canada education savings grants to kick-start savings by low income and middle income parents. HRSD will also be working with provincial and territorial partners to improve assistance to students with disabilities and students from low income families, to help them overcome barriers they face in accessing post-secondary education.

As the House is aware, most new jobs are demanding more education and higher levels of skills than ever before. However, 42% of working age Canadians already in the workforce lack the literacy and other essential skills to meet these requirements. In order for Canada to prosper and stay competitive in the 21st century, we must ensure that Canadian workers have the skills, knowledge and supportive environment to keep pace with technological advances, to contribute to innovation and to stay resilient in the face of ever-changing work demands.

This is why the government is committed to developing a new workplace skills strategy to help boost literacy and other essential job skills for apprentices and workers. This strategy, led by HRSD, will build on current federal programs and activities such as sector council initiatives, apprenticeship programs, workplace literacy initiatives, foreign credentials recognition and labour mobility. In all these activities, the department will work in partnership with the provinces and territories, employers and unions, and learning organizations to promote the cost effective development of skills driven by the needs of the workplace.

I believe that all the partnership based programs I have highlighted today illustrate clearly how the department's activities benefit both the nation as a whole and individual Canadians.

In conclusion, I would like to draw the attention of the House to the provisions in the departmental legislation governing the disclosure of Canadians' personal information. The bill includes a single code applicable to all the programs and activities of the department. The code recognizes that personal information is privileged. It will create more clarity, transparency and accountability for the protection of citizens' personal information.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Boulianne (Mégantic—L'Érable, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would first like to come back to what my colleague from Saint-Maurice—Champlain said about poverty, which really is the

core problem. Poverty among families, seniors and children is at the heart of the problem.

A few moments ago, the Parliamentary Secretary addressed the gallery. I too would like to address the gallery and tell them that the real problem is poverty.

During the weekend, I was reading the Campaign 2000 report on child poverty in Canada, the report published in November 2004. According to the most recent data, despite the economic boom, the child poverty rate is at 15.6%. About one child out of six in Canada suffers from poverty. For families, the statistics are the same.

I would like to come back to the prophetic words from my colleague earlier. We must act now to eradicate poverty. We have all the ingredients. Canada could be a leader. Only the political will is missing, as the report says, "What's lacking is the political will. It's time to end the social deficit". Promises must be kept.

There is a whole report like that, talking about the need for more jobs and a better benefit system. I would like to ask my colleague a question. Given that two departments now exist and that, and that even before they did, these reports on poverty had been available for a while, why was nothing done about the problem? Will creating a new agency or hiring many more civil servants eradicate poverty among seniors, families and children, if there is no political will? They are not interested. It is not essential for them.

•(1255)

[*English*]

Mr. Mario Silva: Madam Speaker, I believe it has already been stated several times in the House, certainly by members on this side, that what we are debating today is the creation of the new department, a splitting of the two old departments of human resources and skills development. This is what the bill is about.

Basically the bill is about upgrading programs, making them more efficient and delivering them in a more balanced way to the citizens who are most in need in our society. It is a bill that at one time was supported by all members in the House; unfortunately, that is not the case today.

When we speak about the issues facing our society, be they poverty, seniors' issues, youth unemployment or literacy concerns, these are issues that this department and this government are handling and dealing with on an ongoing basis. So many measures that we have put in place, including the education savings plan and the Canada education savings grants, are part of the building blocks of what we call a social economy.

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If we want to get people out of poverty, we have to give them tools, whether that is literacy skills, parents being able to stay at home and take care of their kids or child care. All of these tools are part of the building blocks of a social economy that help to get people out of poverty. We cannot eradicate poverty with just the stroke of a pen. It is a long process that takes place with a series of measures, which this government started on day one and continues to this day.

Hon. Jerry Pickard (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to congratulate my hon. colleague from Davenport for putting forward what I would perceive as probably one of the most important roles in the federal government.

In his speech, he focused very much on the education, training and lifestyle enhancement that is so important and has done so much for my riding and, I am certain, for ridings across Canada. What I want to be sure of, though, is that these programs we are presently putting forward do cover the same gamut of concern that we have had in the past.

I go back home each summer and I know that youth employment programs are extremely positive and well received. They employ so many young people, giving them skills, work experience and further career development through the youth employment strategy of Canada. That strategy has been extremely successful in my area.

I also know that the job creation partnerships program has gone many miles in order to bring people with skills together with employers who can work with them and develop those skills further. That has been extremely important as well.

As I look at two of these programs for training and developing career skills, I must say that I think both of them have done an amazing job in the past. I would say to my colleague that I hope this type of program will still be high profile in the new arrangement and also will advance and enhance the lives of so many people who are looking for further employment opportunities.

Mr. Mario Silva: Madam Speaker, the hon. member is absolutely right: this is certainly a priority for the government. We have put an incredible amount of money and resources into youth development programs and literacy programs. We value education. In the 21st century economy, we know how important it is for our society to have higher education and people who are highly skilled.

It is lifelong learning that we are talking about, learning from a very early age to whatever age one may be. It is the whole process of training people at all the different ages in their lives, making sure that they go back into training and education programs. As a government we have been encouraging that for years. We continue to do that with this budget and of course through the development of the new department that is going to be created through this bill.

• (1300)

Hon. Peter Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I think my colleague has put his finger on it. I have argued strongly in favour of this new department as a more effective delivery mechanism for the range of programs we have had in the past so that they will be even more effective. My colleague from

Davenport made the point about lifelong learning. I see this becoming the department of lifelong learning in the federal system.

I really like what the member for Davenport said with respect to partnerships and cooperation. While I am very keen that this department and the new department, Social Development Canada, will be more effective, one might say, in the delivery of their line programs, I am also very conscious of the fact there is a danger in the federal system of departments operating in silos.

My colleague mentioned the literacy secretariat, which is HRSD's. That is a secretariat which reaches out, as he said, to the not for profit sector, the provinces and the territories, the first nations, seniors' groups and a variety of others. Also, because there are literacy problems all across the federal system, it reaches out to other federal departments.

I would like some further comment from my colleague from Davenport on ways in which this new and we believe more effective department would be able to reach across the traditional boundaries between levels of government and between government departments.

Mr. Mario Silva: Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague is absolutely correct when he says that this government has gone out of its way to cooperate and work with all levels of government, not just provincial levels of government but also municipal levels of government. We see them all as partners. We are here to work in partnership with the other levels of government.

On that note, I want to thank our government for the incredible work it has done with municipal governments. For many years municipal governments were not even recognized as legitimate partners in the equation and we dealt with provincial governments only, but we have come a long way in working not just with provincial partners on every issue facing this country but also with municipalities across this country.

That is creating great benefits in dealing with environmental issues, transportation issues and of course some of the issues that we have talked about, such as literacy, youth, and employment and poverty issues. We cannot deal with them in isolation. We need to work with our partners. Our government is forward thinking and is willing to work with those partners.

It is important to understand that the mandate of the announcement made by our Prime Minister on December 12, 2003, basically states that we will support government priorities to strengthen the social foundations of Canadian life by helping Canadians to acquire the skills they need to get meaningful work, promoting an efficient labour market and encouraging lifelong learning for Canadians. This is what we are doing today with this legislation. I encourage all members to support it.

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak to Bill C-23. It has been a long time in the pipe and we still do not have any clearer understanding now than we did when we started as to exactly what this ministry is about or how it will operate.

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On the surface, it may be a housekeeping bill to give legislative framework for the new ministry that has been operating since December of last year. I believe we are putting the cart before the horse by creating a ministry and allowing it to operate for more than a year before getting parliamentary approval.

The mandate of this ministry touches on important issues for Canadians, including workplace strategy, apprenticeship programs, employment insurance, student assistance initiatives and the shameful record of the government on social housing, the homeless and persons with disabilities.

When we look at policy relating to what makes our economy healthy and strong, we have some fundamental questions to answer. We have to get it right, whether we operate out of a mindset that says the economy exists to serve human beings or whether we think human beings were created to serve the economy. All social and fiscal policy flows from the primary understanding of the right relationship between people and the economy. Until we build an economy that honours human beings, that permits each and every Canadian to contribute fully and enjoy all the justice and wealth that flows now only to some, I believe we have failed in our work here.

I want to speak for a second about skills development and training. Regrettably, there has been a dismantling of the cooperative approach to training. We need to seriously examine how to improve apprenticeship programs. Canada has a shortage of tradespeople and it will worsen in the next few years. The Conference Board of Canada believes Canada is not prepared to deal with this issue under current apprenticeship programming.

There is a real disconnect in Canada between the need for a trained, skilled workforce and the opportunities available for workers to meet that need. We have systematically dismantled a cooperative approach to training which saw government, industry and labour organizations working together. Funding has been reduced, shifting the burden and the cost of training to the individual in the context of the market. Anywhere we look in the world today, particularly where economies are doing well, education and training are seen as a social investment that benefits everyone, including business and industry.

One of the first and most important decisions by the Irish government, for example, when it moved to kickstart the Celtic tiger, was to invest heavily in education for everyone. Finland sees the availability of skilled, trained workers as essential to any future growth in its economy.

One of the major competitive advantages in the new world economy is a country's workforce. This is why European jurisdictions are changing their laws to allow for dual citizenship to attract immigrants back with their education, training and experience.

In my own community of Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, young people are trying to enter the workforce, displaced older workers are looking for retraining and middle age retirees are looking to make a further contribution. No central facility is available and resourced to take these very willing and valuable workers from where they are to where they want to be. There is a patchwork of short term, mostly dead end programs that simply move people from one situation of frustration or poverty to another.

We used to have a network of properly funded community colleges offering programs that were easily accessible, affordable and connected to real work through partnerships with communities and industry. Apprenticeship programs were often a shared cost agreement between a workplace and a college.

Canada, like most western countries, is beginning to experience major demographic changes that will result in fewer workers. Meanwhile, the demand for high level skills will continue to increase in all sectors. Given these trends, competition for highly skilled workers will intensify within Canada and between Canada and other countries.

Recent surveys suggest that Canadian industry is set to lose approximately one-third of its skilled workforce in the next five to ten years and this in many economic growth sectors.

● (1305)

To address these forecasted shortfalls, a great deal of effort on developing efficient and effective training strategies in the trade skills and on replacing its current workforce is required.

One very successful approach has been developed and tested by CSTEAC, the Canadian Steel Trade and Employment Congress, in partnership with Mohawk College, Dofasco, Lake Erie Steel and the United Steelworkers of America.

An hon. member: That is Hamilton.

Mr. Tony Martin: That is right.

This program is a co-op based apprenticeship program that integrates a college technician diploma program with a 16 month segment of trade school paid apprenticeship training. The Mohawk-Dofasco-Lake Erie-United Steelworkers pilot approach has been applied successfully to the electrical and mechanical disciplines.

One worker says, "In the plant where I was an apprentice there were 400 apprentices in the earlier eighties. Now there are only two. And the small number of apprentices, less than one per cent of Canada's workforce, are among the dwindling number of Canadians receiving any employer support for workplace training".

Whether we are talking about the old economy or the so-called new economy of highly skilled workers, Canadian workers are well aware that access to education and training is absolutely crucial to their job security and earning power. There is overwhelming evidence showing that everybody wins when every worker has access to skills training.

Investment in education makes sense for the employer, for the worker and for society. We cannot allow education, training and skills development to become simply another commodity in the marketplace, nor can we leave it to the whim of a benevolent employer. It is the very underpinning of a civilized, intelligent and caring society and should be treated as a right or an entitlement. Every citizen should be encouraged and supported in their efforts to contribute to their community to the best of their ability and have access, without fear of cost, to the best training and education possible to that end.

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These are the social democratic principles we, as New Democrats, will be bringing to the policy debate in our country and in the House, which brings me to the debate we are having here this morning. We are looking at the new bill that the government has proposed to establish the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development and to say to the House that we have some very real concerns.

I have been here for some nine months and I have not seen anything that indicates that the government is at all interested in even coming close to the principles that I have just laid out in the few thoughts that I have shared so far this afternoon in the House.

When we first expressed support for it, we thought the bill was simply a housekeeping bill, giving legislative framework for a ministry already up and running for a year. We think it is good to streamline ministries from time to time, separating social development policy and program work from HRDC program delivery. However at the time we registered our concern that the government, in its ongoing slighting of Parliament, had the ministry in operation a full year without parliamentary approval. We found out later that this is a government that actually continues, time and time again, to ignore Parliament.

Parliament defeated the bill that would have split foreign affairs and international trade, but what is Parliament to the government? Government goes ahead and does it anyway.

A parliamentary committee rejected the appointment of the former mayor of Winnipeg to an environment board because it did not think he was qualified. The Prime Minister does not need Parliament. He went ahead and made the appointment anyway.

A government that has practically no legislative agenda to bring forward to the House, when we have this minority Parliament opportunity to do so much good for the country and our communities, has to give all of us some hesitation. When it finally does bring something forward to actually get our approval, we really need to look at it and to try to understand why it is coming forward in the first place, what the intention behind it is and what the track record is of the government for implementing legislation.

This past year we have watched the new Department of Human Resources and Skills Development in action. Now, we certainly oppose the legislation because of the abysmal track record of the ministry and the government this past year with respect to the Department of HRSDC and its core issues, such as funding community agencies, on which we are wrapping up an investigation as we speak; employment insurance; housing; labour market, work skills strategies; and student loans.

● (1310)

I will speak about funding of community agencies in a moment but right across the board this ministry has been a spectacular failure in its first year of operation under its new name and new mandate. We should have known. The government has shown no indication of changing its billion dollar boondoggle ways at Human Resources and Skills Development Canada.

The Liberal budget did not reflect or incorporate the HR committee recommendations on EI. What a scandal that was. It would have reduced the hours to qualify. It would have addressed the

problems with seasonal workers and would have given more incentives to work rather than the disincentive that now exists.

Our colleague, the member from New Brunswick, has been a tireless champion on the EI file and pushes it every chance he gets. He puts it in the face of government and asks when it will actually get down to spending the money, which the workers put into that fund themselves in the first place, on those things that they need when they find themselves challenged by unemployment and looking to take advantage of new opportunities.

The Liberal budget also had nothing for housing and the homeless which falls under this ministry. It was only in a last death bed recantation that the government finally sat down with the New Democrats and actually put something in the budget for housing that will help people in communities across the country.

With respect to student loans, recent studies confirm that the learning bond idea is a bad idea, helping the more affluent Canadians and not helping ordinary and poorer Canadians. The Liberal budget leaves students out in the cold.

Instead of tackling the funding crisis in post-secondary education, the Liberal government chose to spend \$4.6 billion on corporate tax cuts and still more on the national debt. That was continuing until just a couple of weeks ago when we convinced them that the money would be better spent on people, on communities and on issues that people know are important and need to be addressed. Because of the New Democratic Party we now have some money ready to flow, if we can get the budget passed in this place, to actually help those folks and help those programs.

Less debt is good but a truly balanced budget must also invest in Canadians' priorities. Under the Liberals, tuition has doubled while student aid has dwindled. That leaves more students buckling under their own debt loads. Others are forced to scrap their post-secondary education plans entirely. The big benefit for students in the budget that the Liberal government brought forward and tabled a couple of months ago is something a person has to die to see. Regrettably, I mean that quite literally: students' debts will now be forgiven at death.

Ontario is a have not province in its treatment of students. This is not what Canadians voted for in the past election. The Prime Minister told Canadians to vote Liberal for a progressive government. He promised to make education more affordable. Where is the follow through? The follow through is now happening to some limited degree because the New Democrats held the Liberals' feet to the fire in an agreement to try to get the budget through because we know that there are things that need to be done for people if they are going to take advantage of the new economy and opportunities that are coming at them.

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We now have some money in the budget to help with the question of tuition, particularly for the ordinary and lower income families and students across the province who need support and help in order to access the education that they know they need so that they can contribute with the skills that they will develop in the economy.

Incredibly, students must wait 10 years before applying for bankruptcy protection from student loans. That has been true since 1998 when the Liberals stretched the waiting period from two years to ten years. Only students face this discrimination. Our party will keep fighting until every capable student has a chance to pursue a post-secondary education. Canadians deserve that. Our changing economy demands it.

• (1315)

I want to talk for a couple of minutes about the human resources and skills development funding fiasco, the investigation that we have been dealing with in committee for quite some time now.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development is signalling to the Speaker that maybe my time is up. It is the same behaviour he takes part in at committee when he tries to shut down almost everything I bring forward to try to get to the bottom of that scandal.

Hon. Peter Adams: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. My colleague's interpretation is wrong. I was simply trying to find out how much time was remaining. I certainly was not trying to indicate that his time was up or anything of that sort.

• (1320)

Mr. Tony Martin: Madam Speaker, if that is true, I accept it but it certainly is the kind of behaviour I have experienced in the committee as I have tried to bring forward some very important issues on behalf of the volunteer not for profit sector in our communities as they try to understand the new process in place of requests for proposal from the ministry.

In my community of Sault Ste. Marie, the Canadian Hearing Society has been delivering for a number of years very valuable and important support to the deaf, deafened and hard of hearing. It has lost its contract and does not know why. There has never been any indication that it has done anything wrong or has not been performing up to par or beyond.

As a matter of fact, the ministry offered the contract to the March of Dimes. The March of Dimes in turn wrote a letter to say that it could not deliver on the program as it did not have the expertise to do so. What happened? HRSD said that it was too bad. It has gone back to the March of Dimes and is now in the process of trying to convince it that it should deliver that program. Is that cooperation? Is that called working with partners which are in the not for profit and voluntary sectors? I say not.

There used to be a very cooperative team approach in Sault Ste. Marie whenever new business or industry indicated that it wanted to come to Sault Ste. Marie. All of the not for profit voluntary organizations used to come together under the name "Team Sault Ste. Marie". They would meet with a new potential employer, ascertain what the needs were, set up training opportunities, work with different funding sources to ensure that the money needed and available could be brought to the challenge and offered to a new

company. New hiring halls would be set up. The list goes on of the kind of cooperation that took place. The whole community was the benefactor of that.

We now have an environment in my community and every community across the province where there is competition. People are looking askance at each other and that cooperative approach is slowly but surely moving away. That is how the ministry carries out its mandate in this instance. There is still no action from the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development to address that challenge.

Three or four agencies across the province have lost their funding. The day before the investigation review began in our committee, the ministry advised them that they lost their funding. I wrote to ask for a moratorium. The Bloc also wrote to ask for a moratorium. I know labour organizations across the province gathered with these communities and held a public press conference in which they also asked for a moratorium on this until we could get to the bottom of it. We wanted to find out why so many of these long serving, valuable and excellent agencies had lost their funding. However, they lost their funding anyway and there was no moratorium.

Now as we move to put together what I think is a good set of recommendations to the ministry, these agencies, which are caught up with what the ministry agreed was a faulty process, will not have their issues addressed. They will not get their funding back. They will not be around to take advantage of any new approach that might happen after the valuable work of the committee on this file.

That is why I encourage my caucus not to support legislation to give power to a ministry that still does not seem to understand what it needs to do and how it needs to act in communities to deliver first class training, employment and support to unemployed workers and students across the country.

Hon. Peter Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have listened to the speeches this morning and that has to be the most garbled speech I have heard.

My colleague, who is on the committee, began by saying that he did not really know what the legislation was about. It is about dividing a former federal department, which the House of Commons, including the NDP, said was too large and cumbersome, into two more effective units to streamline the delivery of the services, the delivery of the Canada pension and Canada disability pension in Social Development Canada, and to streamline the delivery of programs in the HRSD department in a more transparent fashion than before, and I have said that many times. The Privacy Commissioner herself commended the legislation for the increased transparency, which is broad.

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The member went on to say that this was housekeeping legislation. It is housekeeping legislation but very important housekeeping legislation. How much more quickly could we move on improvements in the programs if the legislation could go through the House? We have been debating it for months and months, and not on the recommendation of cabinet but on the recommendation of the House of Commons itself. It is very important housekeeping to make a key department, a lifelong learning department, more effective.

He then went on to community colleges and tuition fees. I know he was a provincial member, so was I. He knows that tuition and community colleges fall firmly in the provincial mandate. I believe very strongly that the federal government should take some responsibility for those areas of lifelong learning, but I certainly do not claim that we should dictate tuition. I will point out to him that unlike the province in which he was a member of the legislature, the province of Quebec, in response in part to the very large investments in post-secondary education by the federal government, has removed tuition from its community colleges all together. The province of Ontario moved to the second highest tuition in the country, under the Harris government when my colleague was a member.

The government has improved Canada student loans. I agree there is too much dependence on loans. We put in the millennium scholarships which Ontario partially clawed back, the Canada graduate scholarships. In the last budget we had grants to help with tuition for disabled students in every undergraduate year. We have grants for low income students now. This is federal money going into the provincial jurisdiction in the first year for low income students. We have increased the transfer to the provinces. Therefore, \$8 billion or \$9 billion of federal money goes into post-secondary education, and he argues against it. Why he is arguing against it in considering this bill I do not know.

My idea is that we get these two new departments properly set up so they can get on with the work. Then we try to improve them as effectively as we can. One improvement already made is the Canada learning bond, which only one party in the House opposed, and that was the NDP. I will describe the Canada learning bond.

When a low income child is born, the parents or the caregiver, for example Children's Aid if the child is unfortunate enough to be placed immediately in its care, opens an RESP account at birth into which \$500 is placed. Every year until the child is 15, \$100 is placed in that RESP account. The moneys from those deposits, plus the accumulated interest, become available to the child at the age of 18 for any suitable lifelong education purpose. If the family puts money into the account, for example \$100, the federal government matches it with 40%.

What does the member have against that?

• (1325)

Mr. Tony Martin: Madam Speaker, the member talks about garbled. Talk about garbled, I do not know what the question was. He put several things in front of the House.

I want to make it absolutely clear to everyone in case they have been misled, I was not a member of the Harris government. I was in

opposition at that time and we were certainly in opposition to the increases to the tuitions at that time.

I also made clear in my comments that I understood this to be a housekeeping bill and the fact that we initially said we would support it. However, a bill that gives legislative framework for a department that for all intents and purposes has been up and running for about a year speaks to the arrogance of the government continuing to put the cart before the horse. It is not interested in listening to anything that comes before the House in terms of the direction Parliament itself has agreed the government should do.

The track record of the government over the last nine months, and in my experience, on anything to do with HRSD is what gives my party concern with this legislation.

The government has moved ahead with the same arrogant attitude that got itself in trouble in the first place with the HRSD boondoggle. It is setting itself up to continue to do the same kinds of things. If we do not challenge at this point the development of the department, if we do not move to put in place the necessary checks and balances to give the government some time to look at the recommendations to come forward the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, on the concerns of the not for profit and volunteer organizations with the requests for proposals. then we are being complicit.

The member needs to pay close attention to what those agencies and organizations told us in committee. They live under a regime of intimidation and harassment. That is not healthy if we are to deliver good opportunities and programs for people to receive training and education in the country.

• (1330)

Hon. Jerry Pickard (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, Lib.): Madam Speaker, when I listen to some folks, it amazes me how biased they really can be. I heard nothing positive from my hon. colleague who presented a 20 minute speech and at this point probably a five minute retort to a question to him.

I know that in this last week we have had a major announcement on housing by the Minister of Housing and this will affect low income people. I know we just had a major announcement on child care facilities, adding 50% to child care facilities in the country with Ontario receiving \$1.8 billion alone and \$5 billion across the country in the next five years.

Government Orders

When I look at the kinds of programs we have, right now is a great time in Canada for young people training. Those people who are on youth employment programs across the country, and we are talking about tens of thousands of young people, are given the opportunity in the summer to work in a field in which they have developed skills in school, to enhance those skills, to get work experience and to develop a background where they can say that they have worked in the field and have done the work they have been trained to do. In other words, they have a curriculum vitae in the work that is being provided through the federal services.

When I look at what we are doing in human resource development, the RESP is a fantastic opportunity for young families and people to be educated. I have to ask my colleague this. How can this all be negative?

Mr. Tony Martin: Madam Speaker, it is not all negative. Anything positive that has come forward from the government by way of budget initiative has happened in the last couple of weeks in a death-bed agreement with the NDP.

There was absolutely nothing for affordable housing in the budget until we came along and said that the government had to put something into the program. There would have been no agreement with anyone in the last week, including Ontario, had we not insisted there be money for affordable housing in that budget.

The only thing positive in the last couple of weeks coming out of the government is coming out because of an agreement with the New Democratic Party that insisted corporate tax breaks be taken out of the budget and the \$4.6 billion that would be freed up would go into programs for people and communities.

The only positive things coming out of the government after nine months are those that have been put into the budget in an agreement with the New Democratic Party.

• (1335)

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Madam Speaker, let me begin by thanking my fellow parliamentarians for their support and discussion as this legislation has worked its way through the House.

Bill C-23 has benefited from the input of all parties during its review by the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

The fact that we even have this act and the new Department of Human Resources and Skills Development is, in part, a response to a recommendation made by the committee in June 2000.

At that time the standing committee advised us to divide HRDC, the department's predecessor, "into several more homogeneous and focused structures".

That was sound advice, given the need for greater national attention to human resources development, a priority for all Canadians and especially a priority for countries coping with the pressures of our knowledge and information driven world in the 21st century.

In response, we narrowed the new department's focus to the development of labour markets, skills and creating a culture of lifetime learning.

This is one of the most important things that government can do to enable Canadians to thrive and prosper in the workplace and in the community, and to help Canadian businesses compete in an aggressive global economy.

To understand the value of HRSD's work, we have to appreciate that the labour market is ever changing. While we tend to talk about things such as technological innovations and the advent of globalization, the real story is the impact of these transformative trends on the lives of Canadians.

Roughly 75% of new jobs require some form of post-secondary education, a quarter of them demand a university degree. For Canada to remain competitive in the global marketplace, we need to develop a highly skilled labour force.

Our economy will only continue to grow to the extent that we have well educated and creative workers capable of producing innovative products and services.

The corollary of all this is that people today need to be constantly acquiring new skills to do their jobs and remain employable. The days when a high school diploma was enough to secure employment and jobs for life are long gone. Learning must now be life long. That means laying the foundation in early childhood, ensuring adequate access to post-secondary studies, and enabling workers to continue to learn and develop new skills while they are on the job.

The changing composition of our families and communities also has implications for the workforce. On account of our aging population, people leaving the workforce outnumber those who are coming in. Consequently, we need to maximize participation of all Canadians, including those who have traditionally been marginalized, for example, aboriginal people and Canadians with disabilities.

We also need to make better use of the skills already in the labour market, such as those of recent immigrants and the skills that they bring with them when they enter our country.

In 2000, 58% of working age immigrants had a post-secondary degree at landing, compared with 43% of the existing Canadian population. Yet all too often these highly skilled and educated people are unable to put their skills to work in Canada because we do not recognize their foreign credentials.

Consider that immigrants are expected to account for all net labour force growth by 2011 and all net population growth by 2031. Then we begin to see how critical it is that we had better integrate new Canadians into our communities and fully capitalize on their skills.

Nothing remains static. Just as life is changing for Canadians, government policies and programs must also respond to the complexity of the world around us and reflect the diversity of the citizens that we serve. Given the relentless rate of change and challenges confronting our country, we need a more nimble, more responsive organization, and that is what this legislation is designed to do.

Government Orders

As a result of the division of responsibilities between HRSDC and Social Development Canada, we can now concentrate more effectively in promoting a highly skilled and mobile workforce and an efficient and inclusive labour market.

That work starts at the earliest stages of life when we provide opportunities for parents to stay home to nurture their young children and through federal investments like the Canada learning bond and the Canada education savings grant program that help them save for their children's future education.

It continues through the teen years and early adulthood, through the broad range of initiatives under our youth employment strategy that help young Canadians gain the knowledge, skills and experience they need to make their mark in the job market, and through the \$1.3 billion made available annually under the Canada student loans program, the loans and special grants, to ensure a post-secondary education is within the reach of all Canadians regardless of family income.

It carries on into the labour market by helping workers develop their skills in line with job opportunities. These include active employment measures under the employment insurance program, assistance for apprenticeships and a workplace skills strategy that will include a pan-Canadian approach to assessing and recognizing the foreign credentials of immigrants.

• (1340)

All these efforts will help to build the highly skilled workforce that Canada needs to retain our status as one of the world's most successful societies.

Doing things differently also means that we cannot be all things to all people, any more than we can develop a one-size-fits-all policy that meets Canadians' needs and expectations. We need to draw on the skills, the resources, the ideas and supports of people in all walks of life in all corners of our country, and to work more productively with other governments, the private and voluntary sectors and educators to ensure that every Canadian has a chance to achieve and contribute to his or her full potential.

This collaborative approach recognizes the shared responsibility in this domain and the need to work with all partners to set goals, focus resources and take collective action. Each order of government has an important role to play on issues close to HRSD's mandate. Let me also be clear that this legislation is subordinate to the Constitution Act and we will respect the division of powers.

Bill C-23 also deals with the sharing of services with Social Development Canada. Streamlining our processes and sharing our resources with SDC represents good value for taxpayers. An integrated service delivery network can effectively deliver the services Canadians need.

This act deals, as well, with the sensitive issue of sharing personal information, an important responsibility our government fully respects and is committed to uphold.

The act includes a code of personal information to govern disclosure and ensure due diligence for the management of all personal information. We are confident this code achieves an appropriate balance between the need to protect personal information

and the use of such information through administrative programs and services.

I can assure my hon. colleagues that we have been very prudent in preparing this legislation, ensuring every reasonable precaution will be taken to protect individuals' privacy rights and the security of their personal information, which is so important to Canadians.

This legislation would formalize the legal structure and provide the tools and resources necessary to make the department operational, confirming in law the arrangements set in place in 2003.

What the employees who make up HRSD need are the powers and the authorities contained in Bill C-23 that would let them fulfil the department's mandate. That mandate is to improve the standard of living and quality of life of all Canadians by promoting a highly skilled and mobile workforce and an efficient and inclusive labour market. They know that skills and learning stimulate the economy, and give value and a sense of worth to every member of our community, helping to create a Canada that makes us both competitive and proud. They just want to get on with the job.

Canadians expect Parliament will ensure the speedy passage of this legislation and advance this very important agenda. Like them, I am counting on my fellow colleagues to join me to do just that.

Hon. Peter Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened with great interest to my colleague from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour and I want to thank him for a very thoughtful and personal speech. I know of his commitment to this area. I know he is the chair of the government caucus on post-secondary education and research. I could tell from his remarks about lifelong learning that he understands there is no way we can take one part of training, for example, apprenticeships or medical training or early childhood development training, out of the system. Somehow we have to build the entire pyramid. It has to go from the best quality of early childhood development to, for example, literacy programs for seniors which the government offers.

The purpose of Bill C-23 is to set up a lifelong learning department which will, first of all, deliver more effectively existing programs. It will develop new programs and integrate programs better. It will work, as my colleague said, with our partners in the provinces and territories, and in the not for profit areas and in the first nations communities and so on, across Canada.

It is really interesting that we do not hear the expression "brain drain" very much in Canada. I can remember only a few years ago when there was an enormous concern in the country about brain drain. My colleague quoted some of the figures now about the level of qualifications of immigrants coming into the country. In the colleges and universities we discover that bright young Canadians who have gone overseas are coming back and bright young people from other jurisdictions are being attracted into Canada to the point where we more often hear criticism of how long it is taking to re-adapt highly qualified immigrants into the system than the fact that we are losing people in a net fashion overseas.

Government Orders

I believe the federal government and its roles in post-secondary education has played a very important part in that. We are now attracting people into Canada, retaining talent that we would otherwise have been losing, and we are trying to build the pyramid from early childhood, or even prenatal programs, through to seniors programs which we need in true lifelong learning.

My colleague mentioned the pan-Canadian approach. He knows better than I that we are in an area of shared jurisdiction and I accept that. I certainly do not want, as one earlier speaker indicated, the federal government, for example, dictating tuition fees in colleges and universities. We cannot do that, but I would like to influence tuition fees. I would like to help students who are faced with tuition fees which are too high. That is what the federal government has been trying to do for many years.

I wonder if my colleague would give us some of his thoughts on how best we can deliver the transfer of money to the provinces for higher education and training, and the programs that we deliver at the present time.

• (1345)

Mr. Michael Savage: Madam Speaker, my colleague mentioned that I am the chair of the post-secondary caucus on education. He would probably also agree that I replaced someone of inestimable intelligence and dedication to the cause who is very hard to replace. This is an issue of great significance to me because he mentioned the case of post-secondary education in Canada and we have to look at that.

In my role as chair of the post-secondary education caucus, I have the opportunity to speak to students, university presidents and faculty. One thing that they all say is that they appreciate the fact that Canada has invested heavily in post-secondary education, specifically in the area of research where we are now the highest supporters of publicly funded research in the G-8. That has really sustained universities at a time when provincial funding has been withdrawn.

His specific question was how do we get at the whole area of post-secondary education? I personally support the idea of the dedicated transfer, a Canada education transfer, so to speak, which would do two things. It would demand accountability from all people and it would provide a framework from which we could decide what kind of education framework we want in the post-secondary environment.

Most Canadians do not realize that the federal government commitment to post-secondary education is in the order of \$9 billion a year when we take into account the huge amounts of money that have gone into research as well as transfers to the province, as well as student loans and grants. That is a huge amount of money that Canadians do not know about but should know. A dedicated transfer would let people know where their money is coming from for education. We could move to the very important issue of access because that is the next great challenge that we have in education.

We have great universities. We just need to ensure that they get supported not just by the federal government but also by provincial governments as well as all Canadians.

Mr. Wajid Khan (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Madam Speaker, does my colleague believe that the establishment of the

HRSDC department will result in better programming? In his opinion, how will programs be better delivered?

• (1350)

Mr. Michael Savage: Madam Speaker, I absolutely believe that this new department provides better services to Canadians. Canadians want departments that are nimble enough and strong enough to address specific needs. We all recognized that the old department was very large, and the government decided to divide it up to focus on specific areas that were important to Canadians.

The Liberal government has made great strides in the social development of Canadians, in skills and post-secondary education, and in dealing with Canadians with disabilities and seniors. Dividing up the department provides better transparency, which Canadians are looking for. It also provides better accountability. Above all, it provides a focus so that people who have specific needs know where to go and the government can provide the assistance they need. Bill C-23 helps an awful lot in that regard.

Hon. Peter Adams: Madam Speaker, one aspect of access to lifelong learning, if that is the way to put it, concerns me greatly. Participation in higher education of all sorts, from the trades, to colleges, to universities and so on in Canada is as high as or higher than in any other jurisdiction in the whole world. We have problems with student debt and a variety of other problems, but participation is very high.

Looking at the figures, we will see that participation drops off very quickly among low income families. The government is providing a first year grant for low income students, which is a step in the right direction.

I mentioned the Canada learning bond. As soon as a child is born in a low income family, \$500 will be deposited into the child's RESP account, and \$100 will be deposited each year until the child reaches 15 years of age. When the child reaches 18 years of age, he or she can draw on those moneys, plus the interest which has accumulated over the years, plus any moneys the family or caregiver have deposited in the account matched 40% by the federal government.

I wonder if my colleague would care to comment on that effort to raise awareness of post-secondary education for low income families and any other aspect of education for low income students.

Mr. Michael Savage: Madam Speaker, it is absolutely critical that we ensure that obtaining a post-secondary education is not specifically based on income. It has to be open to those who have the desire and ability.

Last week I had the opportunity to meet with Lord Leitch of the House of Lords in England. He had been asked by Prime Minister Blair to produce a report on where England should be on skills in 2020. He came to Canada because, as he said, Canada has done a lot of things right. I agree with him.

Government Orders

[Translation]

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): Madam Speaker, this bill creates and defines the new Department of Human Resources and Skills Development as a complementary manifestation of federal interference into sectors under provincial jurisdiction, namely manpower and education.

To the Bloc Québécois, this bill also presents an inadequate vision of the EI commission. As a result, the Bloc does not support this bill. The Bloc Québécois has introduced various bills calling for the creation of an independent EI fund. This would help to ensure that EI claimants are treated, insofar as possible, not as numbers but as human beings.

Currently, 14,000 public servants are managing a fund belonging to the employees and employers, and the government is using that fund as a long-term loan, which it has no intention of repaying. Consequently, the Bloc Québécois is calling for the introduction of a bill to make 17 individuals responsible for managing this fund, which belongs to the employees and the employers.

Why do we want this independent fund to be managed this way? Because if an individual in the private sector had sold insurance at astronomical premiums to someone in dire need and who then claimed that insurance, and the insurance company never paid up, the claimant would not have been able to survive for long in that situation. That is why it is absolutely essential that this fund be managed by individuals from different sectors. Having a government representative is more or less important. However, at the very least, this fund should be managed by unions, employees and employers, in order to help people who lose their jobs.

Last year, my riding of Compton—Stanstead estimated it lost some \$23 million as a result of globalization. Industries are closing their doors, including the textile industry. The workers losing their jobs are 52, 53 and 55 years old and they lack the means to find another job as easily as a 20-year-old.

Regarding the massive loss of jobs, in 1995, there was a program known as POWA that was abolished by the current Prime Minister. POWA stood for Program for Older Worker Adjustment. Because of globalization and the massive shutdowns of industries, 50 year old workers are losing their jobs and finding themselves with expertise in nothing but the textile industry. POWA helped these 55 year olds to retrain in another field, to find another job and to learn another way of working. This program was working well. However, in 1995, it was abolished, probably for that very reason.

We are now working on the summer career placement program which is a complete mess, a total free for all. In a number of ridings, the grants have been cut back in this program, penalizing young people. This means that the current government is encouraging young people to leave their rural communities to come to the urban centres. These young people who move from rural communities to the urban centres will not go back to the rural regions because there are no jobs there and no programs to help them either. There are programs in the urban centres, but not in the rural regions. Why would they go back home where they will not find a job? These young people want to work and to be able to pay for their education. Once settled in the city, they do not go back to the rural

communities. The government is inhumane. It does not even blink at the exodus of young people. It has other problems.

As far as community organizations are concerned, there is so much paper, paperwork and administration that the people managing them, who are close to the public needing them, are in the midst of a shambles. The situation is unmanageable. It would take a full-time employee almost to manage it. However, these NGOs, these non governmental organizations get little money and these people become discouraged and drop everything rather than keep making requests, because of the complexity of the administration. Who pays the price? The working class.

In addition, child poverty is mentioned all the time. Indeed, one child in six does not eat three meals a day in Quebec or Canada. There are poor children because somewhere there are poor parents. Parents are poor, not because they want to be, but because the government used certain funds to pay for the house that burned since there was no insurance.

With respect to anti-scab legislation, the Bloc Québécois has fought for some 12 years to protect workers governed by a federal or provincial charter in order to prevent employers from abusing power. Since people in telecommunications, like the people at Radio Nord, are governed by federal charter, they can use strikebreakers.

• (1355)

This means that employers can let months, even years, go by without negotiating, because nothing protects these provincial workers under federal jurisdiction. My colleague tabled a bill, which was defeated by 12 votes. A number of Quebec Liberals voted against the bill. We can see what these people are doing for Quebec.

The other thing I wanted to talk about was the homeless. The government suddenly has money for the homeless and affordable housing. Last week, it set money aside for affordable housing. The strangest thing in all this is that the money is the same money it had promised in 2002. It carried it over to 2003. It has promised this money for so many years. It still has not been put aside and spent. Promise made, promise broken.

It is clear what is happening in city centres, where the homeless and street people have absolutely nothing. It is really unfortunate. The CMHC has become a chartered bank, because it has \$3.4 billion in its account. This money should be used for affordable housing. At the moment it is simply earning interest on taxpayers' dollars.

• (1400)

The Speaker: I apologize for interrupting the hon. member, but it is 2:00 p.m., and we must begin members' statements. The hon. member will have 13 minutes to complete her remarks when the bill is next considered by the House.

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STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

INDEPENDENT BOOKSELLERS

Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in order to recognize independent booksellers across Canada.

Recently, Mr. Vic Fedeli, the mayor of the city of North Bay, proclaimed April 26 Independents' Day in order to celebrate independent booksellers and highlight their importance to the country, both economically and culturally. Not only are independent bookstores vital to promoting and supporting local writers and books, but they also help keep money circulating within their communities.

Gulliver's Quality Books and Toys, an independent bookstore in my riding, has been serving the North Bay area for almost 20 years, supporting local and regional authors as well as bringing Canadian authors to North Bay.

Gulliver's is one of more than 500 independent bookstores across the country that strive to promote regional and local literature which might not be noticed by larger chain stores that buy for the entire country.

On behalf of all hon. members, I would like to congratulate independent booksellers across Canada on the work they do and the valuable service they provide to their communities.

* * *

ORANGEVILLE FARMERS' MARKET

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this past Saturday, May 7, I had the opportunity to take part in the opening of the 14th annual Orangeville Farmers' Market. Each year the market opens with a free pancake breakfast, complete with real maple syrup courtesy of Marlene Black and the team from Orangeville Insurance Services. Following the breakfast, the Royal Canadian Legion led the procession and the market was officially opened for 2005.

The Orangeville Farmers' Market will be home to the Blues and Jazz Festival in the first week of June and will also host the Strawberry Festival in early July.

None of this would be possible without the strong support of Mayor Drew Brown and the town council as well as the numerous performers and vendors taking part. Much is also owed to Janice Gooding, who is in her fifth year of managing this event.

With a schedule jam-packed with performances and vendors and all around fun, the Orangeville Farmers' Market is sure to offer enjoyment for all throughout the months to come.

* * *

RICHMOND HILL

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, after 30 years of service as chief administrative officer for the Town of Richmond Hill, Dave Weldon will be retiring at the end of May.

During his tenure, the town staff has increased from approximately 80 to 600 people. Growth has been the mainstay during much of this period. Under his calm and professional approach, the town has thrived. His ability to make people feel at ease and also his ability to critically analyze issues have been important in helping to guide and to respond to matters ranging from development to economic growth and transportation concerns.

Leadership, the ability to articulate what the objectives are and instilling confidence in employees are what Dave is famous for. Having spent 12 years on Richmond Hill council, I can testify to his encouraging manner and the respect that he has from elected officials and staff.

As member of Parliament for Richmond Hill, I would like to wish Dave, his wife Carol and their children the very best in the future.

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[*Translation*]

ERNEST NANTEL

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, at the 21st Laval volunteer recognition ceremonies, posthumous tribute was paid to a friend of mine, a man I cared greatly for and greatly admired.

Ernest Nantel was president of the Maison des grand-parents de Laval. We started this up a few years ago with the help of a group of seniors, including Monique Sourdif, Gisèle Legault, Michèle Grimard, André Grimard and François Gaudreau.

His great involvement in this organization helped eradicate the isolation felt by so many teenagers and seniors. He would be proud to learn that the agency to which he gave so much of himself has been named volunteer agency of the year for 2005.

Ernest, although you are greatly missed, you will continue to live through the social legacy you have left behind.

* * *

[*English*]

HERRING FISHERY

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, serious concerns over herring stocks off the shores of Prince Edward Island are continually being raised by fishermen and the general public.

This past weekend, I met with fishermen on the North Shore and they presented evidence of a spring herring fishery which is failing. One fisherman indicated that in five days he managed to catch five individual herring, nothing more.

This follows on independent scientific opinion, in contradiction to DFO science and expressed at a province-wide meeting, that local herring stocks are affected by large herring seiners fishing fall migratory stocks.

The fundamental principle upon which DFO manages fisheries resources is that of conservation first and foremost: the precautionary principle. Therefore, I am calling upon the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans to exercise that precautionary principle and put in place a full moratorium on the large herring seiner fleet, preventing it from fishing off Prince Edward Island.

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●(1405)

DNA DATA BANK

Mr. Vic Toews (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as many Canadians are aware, Karla Homolka will be released from prison this July. What many Canadians do not know is that the current Liberal scheme does not allow for the collection of her DNA.

Last Thursday in the justice committee, important amendments were passed to expand the retroactive provisions for DNA collection from offenders like Karla Homolka. Unfortunately, the Liberals have left this important initiative to the eleventh hour and only acted because of pressure from the opposition Conservatives.

In order to ensure that these amendments are passed into law before Karla Homolka is released, I am calling on the federal Minister of Justice to break off the portions of the bill containing the retroactive provisions, which have all party support, and to usher them through the House of Commons at all stages immediately.

The Conservative Party is committed to doing everything it can to assist in this process. Will the justice minister make the same commitment?

* * *

WELLSPRING VOLUNTEERS

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in loving the gift of life, we fear the darkness of death. This is all the more true when the seeds of premature death are sown within us in the form of cancer.

I had the honour of attending an event to support the work of Wellspring, a privately funded organization that provides emotional and psychological support to individuals and families living with cancer. For cancer victims, as this terrible disease consumes their bodies, causing fear and confusion, the volunteers of Wellspring step in.

As cancer treatment removes the seeds of death within the body, the kindness and experience of Wellspring volunteers help to soothe the emotional fear and confusion that set in.

I join the members of the House in applauding the work of Wellspring and its many dedicated volunteers for showing kindness and lending a helping hand to individuals and families battling cancer. They are conduits for spiritual sunshine for those facing the darkness of cancer.

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*[Translation]***USINATECH**

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate a Melbourne company, Usinatech, which recently came away from the Reconnaissance Estrie awards ceremony with honours in the manufacturing sector category and honourable mention in the human resources development category.

Usinatech is one of the largest employers in the Richmond area, with over 200 employees in its three plants.

Founded in 1986, Usinatech specializes in precision millwork, mostly for the vehicle manufacturing sector.

This is not the first time the merits of president Rudy Pelletier's company have been recognized. In 2004, it earned both the Amethyst award for supplier of the year, and the STIQ merit award in recognition of its skilled work force.

The staff and management of Usinatech are a source of pride to the community of Melbourne and to the entire riding of Richmond—Arthabaska.

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*[English]***HOLLY JONES**

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Thursday, May 12, in Perth Park in my riding of Davenport, people from across the community will gather in remembrance of Holly Jones, whose life was tragically taken two years ago.

This is the second annual Holly Jones Vigil in which the community will remember Holly, whose vibrant and beautiful life will be celebrated by her family, her friends and her neighbours this coming Thursday.

There will be messages of hope, poetry displays and arts and crafts butterflies that will be placed around the park. Also, Holly's mother, Maria, will address those in attendance. This vigil will be a remembrance of Holly's life and also a reminder of our need to do everything possible to protect that which is most precious to all of us: our children.

* * *

VE DAY

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on this the 60th anniversary of VE Day of World War II, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all our veterans, fallen soldiers and their families for their service to Canada.

It is important that we do not forget the many sacrifices made by these great individuals as they fought to protect the very freedom that we have now come to cherish as Canadians.

Recently I had the chance to spend time with Mr. Ed Carter-Edwards, a member of the Canadian Air Force who bravely served our country in Europe during World War II. Mr. Carter-Edwards not only fought for our freedom but was also a survivor of the Buchenwald concentration camp in the Netherlands.

On behalf of my colleagues, my constituents, my family and indeed all Canadians, I want to express thanks to Mr. Carter-Edwards and all those valiant soldiers who served our country so we could enjoy the freedoms we hold so dear.

Their service to our country should never be forgotten, for without them we would not be who we are today. Lest we forget.

S. O. 31

●(1410)

VE DAY

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in honour of Victory in Europe Day, or what is commonly referred to as VE Day, and our Canadian veterans from coast to coast. May 8 marked the 60th anniversary of VE Day, and yesterday across this country this historic milestone was celebrated and commemorated.

Also, 2005 is the Year of the Veteran, marking this year's events with a special significance. Veterans' contributions to our country and the quality of life we enjoy today are being recognized with renewed appreciation.

We owe our veterans a deep debt of gratitude that can never be fully repaid, veterans like Louis Doyle, who is visiting Ottawa from Charlottetown to attend yesterday's VE ceremonies at the Canadian War Museum.

These brave men and women who risked and even lost their lives in the service of this country should never and will never be forgotten.

* * *

VE DAY

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the coincidental celebration of the anniversary of VE Day on Mother's Day this year has been doubly moving for me personally.

My mother, Klazina, was Dutch, and under Nazi occupation. My father, Harry, was with the Canadian Forces Governor General's Horse Guards. Their meeting during the liberation of Holland, their marriage and the opportunity to raise their family in freedom are a direct result of the valour and bravery that we are celebrating on a larger scale this week.

These qualities that carried Canadian Forces to victory in the defence of freedom 60 years ago are shared by our veterans and Canadians currently serving with our forces.

Today I pay tribute to the men and women who work to keep that spirit and memory alive in the legions of my community: Andrew Mynarski (VC) No. 34; General Monash No. 115; General Sir Sam Steele No. 117; Ukrainian Canadian Veterans No. 141; Winnipeg Polish Canadians No. 246; West Kildonan No. 30; and the McGregor Armoury, home to the Fort Garry Horse, its regiment, cadet corps, veterans association and the museum.

Today we remember those who made the supreme sacrifice, and we honour our veterans, who leave us a legacy of freedom.

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ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Jim Prentice (Calgary Centre-North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what aboriginal Canadians fear most is the continuation of a Liberal administration which patronizes them but which lacks the courage or the vision to address the real problems.

The scope of the Liberals' incompetence and their complacency in accepting and indeed institutionalizing aboriginal poverty in Canada has been shocking.

After 12 Liberal years, here is what we see. There are more aboriginal child suicides than ever. There are more aboriginal children with fetal alcohol syndrome than ever. There are more teenage pregnancies, more gangs and more community violence than ever. The education gap widens. The community infrastructure gap widens.

The Liberals meanwhile continue to force-feed aboriginal Canadians a diet of broken promises, unfilled dreams and rhetoric, with nothing in the throne speech, nothing in the budget, little action on residential schools and none on the matrimonial rights of aboriginal women.

A Conservative government will change all this and will bring new hope. We will pursue a new Conservative agenda with courage and resolve, striving to improve the living conditions and the future hopes of aboriginal women and children.

* * *

[Translation]

ALEXANDRE DEMERS AND DAVID DESHARNAIS

Mr. Odina Desrochers (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the municipality of Laurier-Station is jubilant. For the first time in the RCM of Lotbinière, two young hockey players have made their mark in Quebec's major junior league, namely Alexandre Demers and David Desharnais.

In 2002, having successfully graduated from minor hockey, Alexandre was drafted by the Drummondville Voltigeurs. He rapidly developed his talent playing at centre and he has a reputation for winning nearly 60% of face-offs.

As for David, after playing with his friend Alexandre, he left in 2003 for Chicoutimi, where he became one of the most productive offensive players in his new team, the Saguenéens. He finished the year fifth among the league's scorers, with a total of 98 points.

On behalf of the mayor of Laurier-Station, Gérald Laganière, the people of the riding I represent and myself, congratulations, David and Alexandre. We are proud of you.

* * *

●(1415)

[English]

INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was mere days ago that the revenue minister savaged Premier McGuinty for saying that Ontario was getting shortchanged by Ottawa.

The revenue minister criticized the premier's methodology and accused the premier of extreme provincialism. Premier McGuinty needed to learn that taking a position different from that of his Ottawa cousins automatically makes him an extremist.

Oral Questions

But who knew so shortly after Premier McGuinty became an extremist that the Prime Minister would agree with the premier? In fact, the Prime Minister found \$6 billion, apparently in an old sock, to address the fiscal imbalance that does not actually exist. We know it does not exist because the revenue minister proved that, using the latest data and watertight reasoning.

Only someone who is right out of their gourd would disagree with the revenue minister, which brings us back to the Prime Minister. I guess the Prime Minister's deal makes him an extreme provincialist too.

I know the revenue minister would agree that we cannot have an extremist in the Prime Minister's Office. I know we can count on him to help us remove the Prime Minister from that office at the earliest opportunity.

* * *

[Translation]

VOLUNTEERISM

Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Saturday, in Magog, I attended the annual Gala des bénévoles.

I want to congratulate all the winners, and particularly Lucille Pouliot, who was named volunteer of the year for her involvement with the AFEAS Saint-Patrice women's group and the Carrefour du partage community organization for the underprivileged.

More than 500 people got together to celebrate these individuals who generously give their time, which reflects the vitality and community spirit of the Magog area.

I am always impressed by such passionate people, who are prepared to selflessly give their time for a cause they are committed to. Be it with the sick or in social, environmental, sports or cultural causes, you can count on the volunteers.

I admire their dedication, kindness and respect for others. They are an important component of society, our true collective wealth.

Thank you to all volunteers in Magog and elsewhere.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, according to Liberal insiders, Michel Béliveau was the second most powerful Liberal Party organizer. He testified that he helped funnel over \$300,000 in laundered funds to the Liberal Party for the 1997 federal election. Liberals who received this dirty money are now in the Prime Minister's caucus and senior staff.

Who in the Prime Minister's current caucus or cabinet received dirty money?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is also important to recognize that this morning's testimony by Mr. Corbeil contradicted some of Mr. Béliveau's testimony.

Once again, when we comment on individual testimony we really do run the risk of making errors. The only way we are going to actually get to the bottom of this issue is to allow Justice Gomery to complete his work.

Further, I would urge the hon. member to reflect on Mr. Béliveau's testimony in that he said that he had acted alone and that he had not informed anyone else within the party structure of his actions.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are no contradictions on this point: Liberal MPs who benefited from dirty money are part of the Prime Minister's inner circle. They include parliamentary secretaries, special advisers and the Prime Minister's own principal secretary.

The Prime Minister said that anyone who knew about dirty deals and did not say anything should resign. Do these confessions not make it clear that someone should be fired?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if we are going to rely on individual testimony, then we ought to accept as fact that there are allegations against the Conservative Party, for instance, or that there are allegations against the Parti Québécois, the Bloc cousins in Quebec. That would not be fair to the reputations of the Conservatives nor the reputations of the Bloc. In fact, it would not be fair to anyone involved in the political process in Canada.

What would be fair is to follow the leadership of this Prime Minister to support the work of Justice Gomery and get to the truth because this is an issue that is important for all Canadians and we owe it to Canadians to get to the truth.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister himself has said what is fair. He said, "Anybody who knew about that and did nothing should resign immediately".

A top Liberal organizer has testified that he helped funnel \$300,000 in laundered cash to the Liberal Party. Today he revealed that the transport minister's director of communications, Irène Marcheterre, received \$6,000 in dirty money for campaign work. Why is she still holding a senior position with the minister?

● (1420)

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would caution the member not to go on one more time with unsubstantiated allegations. The reality is that there are processes in place to look at these things. We will listen to the evidence, talk to the individuals and make our decisions in due course.

[Translation]

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today at the Gomery inquiry, Benoît Corbeil revealed that the campaign of the former minister and current member for Bourassa received a brown envelope stuffed with \$5,000 in dirty money. A year ago, the Prime Minister said that if a member of his cabinet or caucus was involved in the sponsorship scandal then they should resign on the spot.

Will the member for Bourassa be held accountable for his involvement in the scandal?

Oral Questions

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, these are nothing but unproven allegations. These are not facts. There are many other allegations, for example, that the Conservative government at the time was involved in more political interference than the Liberal government.

[English]

The fact is that any of these allegations are simply that. They are allegations and they are unproven. Whether they are allegations against the Conservatives, the Bloc or the Liberals, Canadians want us to get to the bottom of this issue and do the right thing, which is exactly what our Prime Minister is doing. He is putting country above party and he is doing the right thing. He is getting to the bottom of this issue for Canadians and not playing cheap politics with—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Calgary Southeast.

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC) Mr. Speaker, this is all about the Liberal Party putting itself ahead of the country. Does he not understand that? These are not allegations, sir. These are admissions by senior people who ran the Liberal Party and who are admitting to the dirty money.

The Prime Minister last year said, “Anyone who knew about that and did nothing should resign immediately”. Now we know that there are parliamentary secretaries, MPs and senior staff who received dirty money. The testimony and the evidence is there.

Will they be held accountable or not? Will the Prime Minister keep his word and fire those who had knowledge about the scandal?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is little wonder that, in reference to the hon. member for Calgary Southeast, the Friday *Globe and Mail* editorial stated:

Well, perhaps Canadians are fairer- minded than...[the member for Calgary Southeast]. Perhaps they are not as keen to seize on any excuse, however tenuous, to push the country into an election. Perhaps they have higher standards.

It is interesting to note as well that today's *Ottawa Citizen* referred to the hon. member as the “Prince of Meanness”.

Canadians do not like meanness. They like greatness. That is why they support a great Prime Minister, not a mean party like the Conservative Party that is doing the wrong thing at a crucial time.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Benoît Corbeil has confirmed the statements made by Jean Brault of Groupaction: \$50,000 of the sponsorship money was used to pay election workers for the Liberal Party during the 2000 election; \$50,000 was paid to persons who were specifically identified, along with the exact amounts that they received.

Now that there is absolutely no doubt about this and that the government is in a position to check these statements, since there is a lot of staff from its ministerial offices involved, will it put that dirty money in a trust at the earliest opportunity?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that some Groupaction employees gave \$100,000 to the Parti Québécois, and that Groupaction received contracts from the Société des alcools du Québec and

Télé-Québec. That is quite something for a party that claims to be clean.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this is the Liberal tactic of trying to smear others, without any reason, just for the sake of it. What a fine Liberal tactic.

The following individuals are among those who received money: Luc Desbiens, from the office of the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development; Daniel Dezainde, press secretary for the Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec; Irène Marcheterre, director of communications in the office of the Minister of Transport.

How can the Minister of Transport—

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

Mr. Michel Gauthier: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of the Environment is violating all the rules. I would ask you to call him to order. I will put my question after he shuts up.

• (1425)

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

[English]

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a little much to take a lecture from the member opposite on smears. That is all we have heard coming across the House on the unsubstantiated allegations of individuals.

The reality is that the Prime Minister takes the Gomery inquiry very seriously. We will look at all of this information and examine it. We have a process in place to deal with these issues and we will respond.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, out of all the ministerial staff involved and identified as having received dirty money, there is, among others, the Minister of Transport's director of communications.

How could the minister say, last year, in front of every camera, that this was a small parallel group, that it was not the core of the Liberal Party? His own director of communications was involved. How could he make such a statement?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. There is plenty of room for that sort of exchange outside. Members wishing to continue debate may do so outside the chamber, not here. We are in question period now, not debating.

The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

[English]

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is remarkable how quickly people let go of the principles of fundamental justice. I would urge members not to rush to tarnish people who cannot defend themselves.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL RELATIONS

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, instead of discussing the fiscal imbalance responsibly with all of the provincial governments, the Prime Minister continues to make piecemeal changes in an effort to resolve a complex problem.

In the middle of the sponsorship scandal, in which tainted funds were used to subvert democracy, how can the Prime Minister justify once again his negotiating a single agreement, with Ontario, which looks much more like an attempt to buy votes than a way to resolve the fiscal imbalance once and for all?

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, two processes are under way. First of all, there is a major revision of the equalization program which involves taking equalization payments in this country to the highest level ever in history and indexing them annually going forward into the future, plus an expert panel to review the details of the calculations. At the same time, the Prime Minister has indicated he is always willing to sit down with any premier who wishes to discuss specific issues that need resolution.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, is there no one in the government who can reason with the Prime Minister and make him understand that his trying to buy votes with billions of dollars is irresponsible and makes him look all the more suspicious in the eyes of the public? Far from working to his credit, his behaviour will move him closer to the door in the May 18 confidence vote.

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when we are working with a province, whether it be the province of Ontario, the province of Quebec, or any other province in this country on issues such as immigration settlement, labour market development, tax collection consistency, meat inspection, education, learning and training, housing, infrastructure, cities, climate change, and child care, I do not think that is anywhere near buying votes. It is doing exactly what we promised to do when we went into the election last year.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for years economists from both the right and the left have been decrying the government's dismal forecasting record. The IMF has been critical recently of such inaccurate forecasting.

People in this country have been denied a real debate about budget choices and about our capacity to invest in our provinces, our families and our environment. Given what has been happening lately, why should anyone believe Liberal forecasts?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government has a very strong record in terms of balancing the books and producing surplus budgets for Canadians, eight of them now consecutively since 1997. In that period of time we have

enjoyed a number of economic benefits, not the least of which is the creation of two million net new jobs in Canada.

In terms of the forecasting process, we have an examination under way by Dr. Tim O'Neill. I expect to receive his report shortly. I will be very happy to share his conclusions with the House.

* * *

● (1430)

CANADA-U.S. BORDER

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, many of those jobs are at risk because of Liberal inaction at the Windsor-Detroit border. In fact, the Prime Minister promised in the last election that he would support a made in Windsor solution. He also promised cold hard cash.

I would like to know from the finance minister how much of this weekend's announcement is cold hard cash to fix the Windsor border and protect Ontario's economy?

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to tell the hon. member that the cash is there for the projects that have been agreed upon with the province of Ontario by the Government of Canada. We hope to take the city onside. The cash is there and we are ready to spend it anytime.

* * *

THE BUDGET

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government's new do-over budget really sets a new low in fiscal responsibility. Essentially it gives \$4.5 billion to the leader of the NDP as long as he can dream up some way to spend it. It is kind of like handing a match to an arsonist.

When will the finance minister admit that he is nothing more than an NDP puppet? When will he resign?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would point out that Bill C-43, the budget implementation bill introduced after the budget speech on February 23, is a piece of legislation that was proceeding rather well through the House of Commons, until the Conservative opposition did a 180 degree flip-flop. The net result was that the government had to look for other configurations of support in the House of Commons.

Since that flip-flop on the part of the Conservative Party threatens to deprive Canadians of the great advantages contained in this budget, I would again ask the hon. member, when will he resign?

The Speaker: I am sure the hon. member appreciates the question, but now it is his turn to ask one. We will hear from the member for Medicine Hat.

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, is that not cute; somebody thinks he is still relevant.

It is bad enough to add \$4.5 billion to the budget without a plan. Leaving all that money in the hands of the NDP is kind of like setting it on fire.

The minister has lost his credibility. When will he resign?

Oral Questions

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I should remind the hon. gentleman that the simple repetition of a falsehood does not make it true.

The fact of the matter is that the arrangements that we arrived at in Bill C-48 have ensured that there will be no deficit. They have ensured that the debt repayment plan will continue. They have ensured that any new investments are consistent with previously existing Government of Canada policies. They have ensured indeed that the tax program of the government will continue.

Mr. Charlie Penson (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in their desperation to get this \$4.5 billion deal on paper, the Liberals and their NDP sidekicks have put the cart before the horse.

Here's what Don Drummond, who works for the TD Bank, said: "For years the government has wanted an instrument that would allow it to allocate spending without having to say what it is for". He said that is what the act will do. Drummond, who worked for the Department of Finance for over two decades, said that he has never seen anything like this before.

After all the recent spending scandals, when will the government learn to be responsible with Canadian taxpayers' money?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the hon. gentleman is at a loss to understand what the money is for, let me refer him to Bill C-48.

It is for the environment, including for public transit and an energy efficient retrofit program. It is for training programs and enhancing access to post-secondary education, including for aboriginal people. It is for affordable housing across Canada, including for aboriginal people. It is for foreign aid.

Which of those things does the official opposition disagree with?

Mr. Charlie Penson (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what Canadians disagree with is seeing their hard-earned tax dollars wasted by the Liberal government.

It is only a matter of time before the money finds its way into ridiculous projects like the ones we are hearing about at the Gomery inquiry, such as plaques in Europe and television programs in China.

With no plan, no program and no leadership for the \$4.5 billion slush fund, how can Canadians have any confidence in the finance minister or in the Liberal government in fact?

• (1435)

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for the simple reason that this very bill makes it very clear that there will be no deficit, that this very bill makes it very clear that the debt repayment program will continue, that this very bill makes it very clear what the priorities are going to be.

I think Canadians will be very interested to know that the official opposition thinks public transit and energy efficient retrofits are a waste, that the official opposition thinks training programs for young Canadians are a waste, that the official opposition thinks affordable housing, especially for aboriginal people is a waste, that the official opposition thinks foreign aid is a waste. Shame on the official opposition.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Côté (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the amount promised by the Prime Minister in exchange for votes in the next election has reached \$13 billion: \$4.6 billion to buy the NDP votes, \$5.75 billion to try to buy votes in Ontario and \$3 billion on various pre-election promises here and there.

How can the Prime Minister refuse to resolve the fiscal imbalance and instead commit to spending several billion dollars, with the sole and obvious goal of buying votes for his government?

[*English*]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is amazing how in the space of 35 seconds the hon. gentleman not only double counted but triple counted. Obviously he does not quite know how to read the balance sheet.

The fact of the matter is the Prime Minister has indicated that when premiers have issues of specific implication that they would like to discuss with him, the Prime Minister is available for that discussion.

I would point out that we are always working with the government of Quebec and Premier Charest, as we are with all other provinces. A very good example of that not long ago was the successful agreement we concluded on parental leave.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Côté (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois asked the Prime Minister to resolve the fiscal imbalance and undertake a major overhaul of EI in his last budget. The Prime Minister rejected these demands out of hand. Instead, since tabling the budget, the Prime Minister continues to increase expenditures. He has added \$13 billion in new initiatives solely to try to buy votes in the next election.

How can the Prime Minister justify that, in addition to using the dirty money, he is now trying to use taxpayer dollars to buy his election?

[*English*]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with respect to employment insurance, I would point out to the hon. gentleman that in the last year we have not only reduced the premiums but also increased the benefits to well serve those who need the employment insurance program across the country.

In terms of the fiscal imbalance, I would point out that the transfer payments from the Government of Canada to the provinces are now at an all-time record high and are rising. We will continue to contribute constructively to the financial well-being of Canadian provinces.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last year, the Minister of Transport said there was no question of announcing investments prior to an election. He said that would make the government look like Santa Claus. However, since April 1, thanks to the magic of Christmas in April, the government has pulled \$13 billion out of its stocking.

Oral Questions

Does the Prime Minister recognize that his actions are nothing more than an attempt to buy an election with public funds, something his Quebec lieutenant condemned last year?

[*English*]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the election, or the alleged election, is either within the hopes and dreams or the hallucinations of the opposition. The fact of the matter is this government is focused upon the governing of this country. That means making solid progress on all of those good things contained in the budget, such as child care, the money for cities, the money for the environment, the investment in national defence, the investment in foreign aid, all of those things that this government is committed to and which Canadians want.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, does the Prime Minister recognize that, while he tried to buy the last three elections with dirty sponsorship funds, now he is trying to buy the next election with taxpayer dollars? He should tell the House and the public what he is up to.

• (1440)

[*English*]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a very significant portion of this budget deals with the protection, indeed the enhancement, of the Canadian environment in all corners of this country, including the province of Quebec.

Quebeckers are among the leaders in this country in terms of environmental integrity and environmental protection. Quebeckers want the environmental portions of the budget enacted, as they do the new money for cities, as they do the help with children, as they do the new pensions for senior citizens, as they do the money in foreign aid to assist the poorest of the poor around the world. The hon. gentleman would do well to support this budget.

* * *

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL RELATIONS

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week the Prime Minister sent his revenue minister to attack Liberal Premier Dalton McGuinty for asking that Ontario get a better deal from Ottawa. This weekend behind closed doors the Prime Minister, doing his best Monty Hall to stay in power, made a deal that cut his revenue minister off at the knees.

I ask the Prime Minister who just had this miraculous deathbed conversion to the \$23 billion gap, which Liberal was right, his revenue minister or Ontario's premier?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that the Government of Canada does not accept the thesis with respect to the \$23 billion, as we do not accept arguments with respect to fiscal imbalance.

The fact of the matter is we have said to the premier of Ontario, the premier of Quebec, all the premiers of Canada, that if they have specific issues that need to be addressed in terms of concrete problem solving, for example on labour market development, on immigration settlement, on tax collection agreements, on a better meat inspection system, on cities or infrastructure, we are prepared

to sit down and work out common sense arrangements that benefit all the people of Canada.

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if one listens closely, one can hear the gears of the Liberal election machine being oiled with treasury dollars.

The Prime Minister sent his revenue minister to warn Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty that his talk of a better deal for Ontario was a threat to federalism. Nine hours behind closed doors on the weekend changed the Prime Minister's mind. By signing onto McGuinty's program the Prime Minister has, in the words of his own minister, "put the essence of Canada at risk".

Could the revenue minister tell us, does he still think the Prime Minister is a threat to federalism?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a fascinating exercise to watch a member of the opposition turn himself into a pretzel through misquotations.

The fact of the matter is that we have always said to the province of Ontario, as we have said to every Canadian province, if it has specific issues that it wishes to see dealt with, we are prepared to sit down and talk. There is nothing to be gained by some broad-brush hypothetical discussion about a fiscal imbalance, alleged or not, or about the \$23 billion gap, so-called. Let us talk about the reality of what needs to get done to improve the quality of life of Canadians and we will be at the table.

* * *

[*Translation*]

CANADA POST

Mr. Brian Pallister (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister was aware of the Liberal corruption at Canada Post for a long time, yet did nothing about it. Millions of dollars in illicit contracts were given to Liberal friendly firms. In addition, former Canada Post President André Ouellet received in excess of \$2 million for expenses without receipts.

Could the Prime Minister tell us why the rules of ethics that apply to Canadians do not apply to the Liberals?

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what the member just said is totally false. In fact, Canada Post is currently working in cooperation with the Canada Revenue Agency, which is auditing the expenses of the office of the president of Canada Post. This is still under way. Once that has been done, Canada Post's board of directors will take action. But we have to wait for the officials to conclude their work first.

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Pallister (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): The fact is, Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has been trying to shift the responsibility for wrongdoing on to virtually everyone, rogue bureaucrats and especially his predecessor. However, the wrongdoing at Canada Post came to light on his watch and he has done nothing about it.

It has been more than a year now since André Ouellet was first asked to provide receipts to validate \$2 million in lavish expenses. Yet any objective observer would have to say the Prime Minister has done nothing but swept this issue under the carpet.

He claims to be a wire brush. Why does he keep acting like a feather duster?

• (1445)

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the other official language, for the benefit of the hon. member, he might recall André Ouellet did leave some time ago. Meanwhile, one has to wait for the results of the audit currently being conducted by Canada Revenue Agency of the expenditures around the president's office and the issue of receipts.

The officials are conducting that audit. When it is complete, the board of Canada Post will take the appropriate action.

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AIRPORTS

Ms. Marlene Catterall (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for several years airports across Canada have been asking for new, fairer and more affordable rent agreements for their airports. Ottawa is no exception, and local members have been lobbying hard for a new deal.

Could the minister inform the House how his announcement this morning at the Ottawa international airport helps all airports better serve their communities and the travelling public?

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thought no one would ask. This morning we made an announcement by which 60% of the rent will be cut in every airport in Canada, saving \$8 billion for the airline industry and the travelling public. I want to thank the Minister of Finance for his contribution to this decision.

This is the best news the aviation sector has had in years.

* * *

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, every day Canadians are hearing more and more evidence that their hard-earned tax dollars found their way back to Liberal Party coffers in envelopes stuffed with thousands of their taxpayer dollars. Today former Liberal executive Benoît Corbeil admitted that he too funnelled taxpayer dollars into local Liberal campaigns.

The government has apparently heard enough evidence to bring lawsuits against several of the ad companies, but when will the government respect the will of the House and put that dirty money in a trust?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has been clear, the government has been clear and the party has been clear that if there were funds received for the party inappropriately, those funds will be returned to the Canadian taxpayer.

We can trust our Prime Minister to act on this and to ensure that the party acts on this because our Prime Minister is the individual who has demonstrated the courage to establish Justice Gomery's

work, to support Justice Gomery and to ensure that Canadians have the truth they deserve.

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FISHERIES

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have just returned from my riding in the Pacific northwest where I watched an unprecedented coalition forming.

First Nations, commercial fishers and sport fishers have come together to oppose DFO's irresponsible plans to promote fish farms on the north coast, again a Russian roulette with our wild fish.

The science is clear that open net fish farms are a threat. The Auditor General four years ago said that DFO was not fulfilling its mandate to protect wild salmon from the effects of salmon farming.

Will the minister finally step up and defend the people of B.C.'s coast and put a halt to the expansion of fish farms?

Hon. Geoff Regan (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague considered all the evidence. In fact, he reviewed scientific evidence from my department and he ought to consider it. The government supports the emerging aquaculture industry in the country. It plays an important role in the economies of many coastal communities, as my hon. friend ought to know.

We are committed to assisting the industry as it grows, while at the same time ensuring that this growth occurs in a sustainable way with minimal impact on the environment.

* * *

[Translation]

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Mr. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Honoré-Mercier was vice-president of Gervais-Gagnon from 1993 to 2003. His company paid more than \$46,000 to the Liberal Party in exchange for some dubious contracts, some of these with Canada Post. The member was also involved in the Prime Minister's leadership bid.

How can the Prime Minister still claim to have seen nothing and heard nothing, when one of his organizers was involved in the sponsorship scandal?

The Speaker: I do not see the connection between this question and the administration of the Government of Canada. The hon. member is not a member of the government. He is a member of Parliament but not a member of the government.

The hon. member for Elgin—Middlesex—London.

Oral Questions

• (1450)

[English]

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Gomery commission has pointed the finger at the Prime Minister's office. Canadians are piecing together just how closely connected friends of the Prime Minister are to ad scam.

The former vice-president of the firm Gervais, Gagnon had close ties to the Prime Minister's leadership campaign. His firm benefited from lucrative contracts from Canada Post.

How could the Prime Minister not have known that one of his trusted advisers and key Quebec lieutenants was on the ad scam payroll?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the *Globe and Mail* editorial on Friday said that there was no persuasive testimony that the Prime Minister was involved in any way in any alleged chicanery.

After months of testimony and after over 12 million pages of documents reviewed by the Gomery commission, opposition members have failed to identify any involvement by the Prime Minister of Canada in any of this activity. They are involved in a smear campaign and they ought to respect what Justice Gomery is doing.

Furthermore, the hon. member who just spoke said a few weeks ago, "There's a lot of work still to be done. In a minority Parliament, we can get a lot done. I'm just worried that Canadians may lose confidence in the government and put some in us. They might—"

The Speaker: The hon. member for Cambridge.

* * *

AIRPORTS

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I just observed the minister opposite puff up his chest, say absolutely nothing and get a standing ovation.

Pearson International Airport in Toronto will continue to be the second most expensive airport in the world. The government has announced yet another ineffective program to reduce airport rents that will have little to no effect on Toronto. This plan will not fly with the thousands of workers at Pearson and it will not fly with the millions of travellers.

Why does the government continue to ignore the needs of Ontario?

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, obviously that member has not read the documentation. For the Toronto airport, it means a reduction of \$5 billion. If that is not money, what is money?

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, air travel is very important to Toronto and to Ontario. International carriers are still threatening to stop flying into Toronto. More than 95% of this so-called savings will not even come into effect until the year 2010, just like the government's budget, too little and way too late to help anyone.

Why was the GTA left out of the latest vote-buying, pre-election announcement?

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am sure that if the hon. member would talk to the bond rating agencies, for example, that will be looking at the finances of the GTA, they will be pretty happy and their credit will be much better.

I also want to talk about the Ottawa airport. Its rent will go down by two-thirds. That is \$5 billion for Toronto and two-thirds rent reduction for Ottawa. What more does the member want?

* * *

*[Translation]***CHILD CARE**

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when it is a matter of concluding agreements with Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Ontario, it is amazing how fast the federal government can settle things. But when it is a matter of negotiating with Quebec, despite the fact that Quebec is responsible for the model for child care in Canada, everything is dragged out. Yet the Prime Minister has already said that Quebec would be getting the money with no strings attached.

How can the government explain that it has entered into three agreements on child care with three provinces within three weeks, while the arrangement with Quebec, which was meant to be automatic, is still not settled?

[English]

Hon. Ken Dryden (Minister of Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said in the House before, we have had ongoing discussions and negotiations with the province of Quebec. I am very hopeful that in the days and weeks ahead we will be able to come to an agreement.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, far from making things more difficult, the existence of a complete child care system in Quebec ought instead to facilitate prompt settlement, particularly since Quebec's requirements are already known.

What is the government waiting for to comply with Quebec's demands: the right to opt out with full compensation and without conditions?

[English]

Hon. Ken Dryden (Minister of Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can really only repeat the answer I gave a moment ago, plus the fact that it has been made very clear to everyone in the House and also to everyone in the province of Quebec the kind of inspiration that the province of Quebec has represented in the area of child care. All of what it has done in the past will be reflected in any agreement to which we come.

Oral Questions

● (1455)

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Stockwell Day (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last year the foreign affairs committee voted to support Taiwan's request for observer status at the World Health Assembly and then all of Parliament voted to support that also. When it came time to vote at the World Health Assembly, the government instructed our delegates to vote no, to be in defiance of Parliament, and to leave an abandoned Taiwan.

Last week the foreign affairs committee again voted to support Taiwan's request just for observer status. This time will the government please tell our delegates to support Taiwan, respect the parliamentary procedure here, or will it abandon Taiwan again?

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada has always supported appropriate representation for Taiwan at the World Health Assembly. We have been working quite actively with others toward making that a reality.

Canada would most certainly support a World Health Assembly consensus regarding Taiwan's participation in and access to the World Health Organization. We are encouraged by the very fact that our efforts have been noticed and appreciated by Taiwan's representative in Geneva, the vice-minister of foreign affairs and most recent, from Taiwan's minister of health.

Mr. Stockwell Day (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Taiwan did not appreciate the vote against it. This is unacceptable. Taiwan's location exposes its population to health risks like SARS. On the other hand, Taiwan has the medical research and technology to help in the international fight against these types of diseases.

We support other jurisdictions to have observer status at the World Health Assembly, for instance, the Palestinian Authority. Why do we not support Taiwan? Will the minister give us a clear answer? Will he instruct his delegates to vote yes to support Taiwan for world health status or will we bow down to communist China's pressure again? Which one will it be?

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we will continue to work with the other members of the World Health Organization to ensure that Taiwan is appropriately represented at these institutions. We will ensure that population benefits from and contributes to the services that the World Health Organization can provide. We hope there will be further progress this week.

* * *

[Translation]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Marc Godbout (Ottawa—Orléans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada has allocated \$12 billion to infrastructure since 1993. In addition, gasoline tax revenues will mean allocations of \$5.8 billion for municipalities over the next five years.

Would the Minister of State for Infrastructure and Communities tell the House how this commitment will benefit the public transit system in this beautiful city of Ottawa?

Hon. John Godfrey (Minister of State (Infrastructure and Communities), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, according to scientist David Suzuki, the new deal for cities and communities is truly extraordinary, because it provides an opportunity to improve air and water quality and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Today, our government has made a commitment that illustrates perfectly the partnership Mr. Suzuki praises.

In cooperation with the City of Ottawa and the province, we have confirmed our support for the city's light rail project. The federal contribution will be \$200 million.

* * *

[English]

JUSTICE

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as reported this weekend, the Attorney General of Ontario, Michael Bryant, as most of us, is fed up with "cream puff sentences" handed out to those convicted of child pornography. He states that these sentences have reached "epidemic proportions", with half of the convictions resulting in conditional sentences.

Will the justice minister admit here today that in order to stem the flow of child pornography there has to be an appropriate deterrent and that deterrent can no longer include house arrest?

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this matter has been the subject of discussions between me and the Attorney General of Ontario. I am aware of his recommendation for consideration.

We have referred this matter. We will be getting a report from the deputy ministers and the FPT conference by June 2005. We take those concerns seriously.

The matter is also now before a standing committee of the House for consideration.

Mr. Vic Toews (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the children of Canada can no longer wait for these kinds of recommendations. Over half of those convicted of child pornography crimes serve their sentences in the comfort of their own home. The Liberal Attorney General of Ontario has now joined with the Conservative Party in asking for an absolution of these house arrests.

House arrest is no punishment for those who commit these horrific crimes. Why is the Prime Minister and the government so reluctant to simply abolish house arrest for these crimes?

● (1500)

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we share with the member opposite the concern that the primary concern has to be that of the best interests of the child.

In that context, we are reviewing the best options for that purpose and we will take the member's considerations into account.

Privilege

[Translation]

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): Mr. Speaker, thousands of young people and hundreds of companies and agencies in Quebec are anxiously awaiting the start of the 2005 summer career placement program. This year, Ottawa's funding criteria were changed without any consideration given to young people, the regions or the needs of the agencies. One of the direct consequences of this situation is the risk of a mass exodus of young people.

Does the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development intend to correct this situation and review the criteria of this program as soon as possible in order to index resources and divide them fairly among all the ridings in Quebec?

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, the program criteria have not changed in the least, neither has the methodology. It is tied to the number of young people present in each riding and the number who are unemployed. New data was collected during the 2001 census. In addition, there are now more ridings in the country, and some riding boundaries have been changed. Some variations have thus been observed.

We are prepared to provide all the figures available to show that the methodology has indeed been followed.

* * *

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance.

In his budget speech, the minister pegged the rising dollar as a principal risk to the government's economic and fiscal forecasts and job creation. However the Canadian economy thus far appears to have shown remarkable resilience.

Could the minister update this House on the current status of job creation in this country?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to say that the statistics that were released on Friday indicate that the Canadian economy created 50,000 new full time positions in April. They show the great strength of the Canadian economy. Employment rates and participation rates are near all-time record highs. The unemployment rate fell to 6.8%, which is the lowest level in more than five years.

The Speaker: The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Social Development, Social Economy, on a question of privilege.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Social Development (Social Economy), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Calgary—Nose Hill made reference to

a member who does not sit in this House and who cannot protect herself.

I draw the attention of the Speaker to pages 76, 77 and 78 of Marleau and Montpetit under "Misuse of Freedom of Speech", which states:

Speaker Fraser urged Members to take the greatest care in framing questions concerning conflict of interest guidelines.

With regard to the privilege of immunity in this House, he goes on to state:

Such a privilege confers grave responsibilities on those who are protected by it. By that I mean specifically the Hon. Members of this place. The consequences of its abuse can be terrible. Innocent people could be slandered with no redress available to them. Reputations could be destroyed on the basis of false rumour. All Hon. Members are conscious of the care they must exercise in availing themselves of their absolute privilege of freedom of speech.

He went on to say that Speakers in the past have ruled that when a member's reputation is at stake but that member does not sit in this House, we should be very careful in referring to that member by name.

He also went on to say:

Specifically referring to individuals outside the Chamber, he agreed with a suggestion that the House consider constraining itself "...in making comments about someone outside this Chamber which would in fact be defamatory under the laws of our country if made outside the Chamber..."

I would ask the hon. members of Her Majesty's official opposition, including the Bloc, but I am referring specifically to the hon. member for Calgary—Nose Hill, to refrain from making accusations and impugning motives and allegations on people who cannot defend themselves in the House.

● (1505)

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would just say very briefly in response that you clearly ruled the question in order. We believe it was in order and that it is legitimate to comment on testimony before a quasi-judicial inquiry.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am a little puzzled by the question of privilege. I named the member for Beauséjour who does sit in the House. I named the transport minister who sits in the House. I named no other member so I am not quite sure what the objection is all about.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: Mr. Speaker, I believe if you were to check the blues you would see that it was not mentioning a member of this House. In fact, it was mentioning an assistant to a certain minister whose name I will not use in this House. The hon. member for Calgary—Nose Hill referred to members who are not members of this House. I believe you have ruled before on this question of privilege and the misuse of the freedom of speech by the hon. members of the opposition.

The Speaker: I will look at the blues, as suggested by the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Social Development, Social Economy, and get back to the House in due course if necessary in respect of this matter.

*Routine Proceedings***ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS**

[Translation]

TREATIES

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with permission of the House and pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), I would like to table, in both official languages, the treaties that entered into force in Canada in 2002, 2003 and 2004.

In keeping with recent practice, I am also tabling CD-ROMs that contain the text of these treaties in an electronic format. The CD-ROMs have reduced paper burden, while at the same time providing wide accessibility to the treaties through the Library of Parliament.

* * *

[English]

CERTIFICATES OF NOMINATION

Hon. Raymond Simard (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Minister responsible for Official Languages and Minister responsible for Democratic Reform, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 110(2), I am tabling two certificates of nomination, one with respect to the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority, and one with respect to the Canadian Intergovernmental Conference Secretariat.

* * *

[Translation]

ORDER IN COUNCIL APPOINTMENTS

Hon. Raymond Simard (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Minister responsible for Official Languages and Minister responsible for Democratic Reform, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table, in both official languages, a number of order in council appointments recently made by the government.

* * *

[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Hon. Raymond Simard (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Minister responsible for Official Languages and Minister responsible for Democratic Reform, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 85 petitions.

* * *

[Translation]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

JUSTICE, HUMAN RIGHTS, PUBLIC SAFETY AND EMERGENCY
PREPAREDNESS

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

[English]

The committee has examined the qualifications and competence of Mr. Yves LeBouthillier, nominee to the position of president of the Law Commission of Canada, and finds him competent to perform the duties of that position.

● (1510)

SCRUTINY OF REGULATIONS

Mr. Gurmant Grewal (Newton—North Delta, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 123(1) and 19.1(1) of the Statutory Instruments Act I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Joint Committee on the Scrutiny of Regulations concerning the revocation of subsection 36(2) of the Ontario fishery regulations, 1989, included in this report and from which the notice was given to the regulatory authority.

[Translation]

INDUSTRY, NATURAL RESOURCES, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Mr. Brent St. Denis (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the fifth report of the Standing Committee on Industry, Natural Resources, Science and Technology, concerning the certificate of appointment of Jean-René Halde to the position of president of the Business Development Bank of Canada.

* * *

[English]

FOOD AND DRUGS ACT

Mr. Tom Wappel (Scarborough Southwest, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-379, an act to amend the Food and Drugs Act (food labelling).

He said: Mr. Speaker, this bill is a revised and improved version of one that I introduced in the last Parliament. In it I propose to require basic information on chain restaurant menus and the labels of processed foods and fresh meat. One or more of these measures finds support in reports of the National Academy of Sciences, the Chief Medical Officer of Health for Ontario and the Canadian Institute of Health Information.

Even the most vocal industry critics of the bill recently announced a voluntary restaurant nutrition labelling program that will do some of the things they said were impossible just last spring. The bill is supported by 29 health and citizen groups representing two million Canadians.

I urge colleagues on both sides of the House to make it work. Canadians expect no less.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

The Speaker: I understand that two hon. members wish to move motions again today. Could the hon. member for Edmonton—St. Albert tell us which motion he proposes to move today?

Mr. John Williams: Motion No. 1, Mr. Speaker.

Routine Proceedings

The Speaker: Then I will not even bother asking the hon. member for Davenport because his cannot be ahead of that one. Accordingly, we will proceed with the hon. member for Edmonton—St. Albert.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mr. John Williams (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I move that the first 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.

The first report of the public accounts committee, which I tabled in this House when we came back in the fall, dealt with the issue of the Privacy Commissioner, not the sponsorship program or the sponsorship scandal.

I want to point out the clear similarities between the two when the government does not pay attention to what is going on and how everything gets right off the rails. Perhaps the government did know what was going on and it did it with its blessing.

The report dealt with Mr. George Radwanski, as members may recall. He was a Liberal hack, if I may say. He was appointed by the Liberal government to the position of the Privacy Commissioner, an officer of Parliament no less. The government had not done any background checks other than the fact that he was a major contributor to the Liberal Party.

Apparently, that was quite sufficient for him to get the appointment. The fact that he was bankrupt really did not make that much difference. The government was not that worried about finding out these things.

The fact that Mr. Radwanski owed tens of thousands of dollars in back taxes of course did not mean anything because now he was going to have the money from the salary to pay back his taxes. Then, of course, the court and the Bankruptcy Act wiped all of that clean. He got his salary and he did not have to pay it back. This was just a great little gravy train that he was on.

The Auditor General took a look at what was going on and she said in her report that the former Privacy Commissioner:

—abdicated his responsibilities and that under his stewardship, rules and even basic standards of decent behaviour were routinely and flagrantly ignored and broken. These facts are by now widely known and, with one notable exception, universally accepted

This is how the Liberal appointee, Mr. George Radwanski, who had no other criteria for being in the job, other than contributing to the Liberal Party, was acting as an officer of Parliament. Mrs. Fraser, the Auditor General, went on to say in paragraph 5:

—oversight mechanisms of central agencies—the Treasury Board Secretariat and the Public Service Commission—were insufficient or, in the case of central agencies, not used to either prevent abuse and wrongdoing or deal with them when they occurred.

While Canadians have been horrified at the sponsorship scandal and the revelations that have been coming out almost daily on that,

there are other scandals that maybe did not quite reach the same headlines, but nonetheless are very important.

We have of course the concept that Parliament ensures and authorizes spending by individual departments and agencies and officers of Parliament. However, we found out that because Mr. Radwanski thought he was a small department, with a budget of only \$11 million, that the Auditor General would never come along and take a look at what he was doing.

Since Mr. Radwanski felt that the Auditor General would never show up and take a look at his books, he thought that he could break the rules with impunity. He actually borrowed \$250,000 from next year's spending to cover off his excess spending in that particular year, totally contrary to the Financial Administration Act. This was contrary to the whole concept of Parliament. Only Parliament votes the money. If we do not vote it, they cannot have it.

Mr. Radwanski just helped himself to next year's budget. How he was going to balance the next year's budget we do not know. We never did get around to giving him the chance to figure that out himself because we turfed him out the door.

Then I said to myself that there must be some redress, something must happen. Mr. Radwanski spent money without Parliament's approval. Somebody should come here and do a mea culpa, apologize, and say they are going to fix the problem.

Therefore, I stood up in the House on a point of order or a point of privilege, I do not remember which, and demanded an explanation. Back came the answer that if money is spent that is not authorized by Parliament, there is a little section in the Financial Administration Act that says that is okay. It is deemed to be authorized anyway.

That is the low point of democracy here. We had it with the Privacy Commissioner and we have it with the sponsorship scandal. The whole rules regarding the administration of ethical financial management were totally ignored. The government was complicit and complacent and nobody seemed to care.

● (1515)

Yet, no one has come back to the House to say said that they were sorry and apologize to the Canadian people, and to say that this should not have happened. No one, not the Prime Minister, not the President of the Treasury Board, the Deputy Prime Minister, or the Minister of Finance. No one has stood up here and apologized to the Canadian taxpayer and that is an affront to Canadians.

That is why we must take a look at the sponsorship scandal, the office of the Privacy Commissioner and what else yet we do not know. There was Canada Post where the president was helping himself to millions of dollars in expense reimbursement without producing a single expense receipt.

That is again totally and completely unethical behaviour and no one has admitted that they were responsible. Perhaps the time is coming that someone is going to be held responsible. That is the responsibility of the House.

Routine Proceedings

That is why we have these debates and why no confidence in the government is what causes an election. Perhaps one day very soon the House will express its dissatisfaction with the government and we are off to an election.

As I mentioned, Mr. Speaker, I am sharing my time with the member for Prince George—Peace River and I will turn it over to him.

• (1520)

The Speaker: We have questions and comments first. The hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell.

Hon. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great attention to the remarks of the hon. member. He is asking us to concur in a committee report about an action involving an officer of Parliament, first of all, and not a civil servant in the normal or traditional sense of the word. Second, he will be aware that the position as it was then has been vacated, that a replacement has been found, and is now in the service of yourself, Mr. Speaker, as our representative. Finally, the hon. member will know that the House has concurred in the appointment of the successor.

Given that all of this has occurred, is it not obvious that the purpose of his motion is not to concur in anything at all because the concurrence, history has demonstrated, has already taken place?

I wonder if he would address that and inform the House what the real motivation is here, not just so that I can decipher it, because I think I have already done that, but I want to ensure that you, Mr. Speaker, and all Canadians are able to understand the exact motivation of what the hon. member is up to.

Mr. John Williams: Mr. Speaker, the motivations are quite obvious. I was drawing a distinct parallel between the fiasco at the office of the Privacy Commissioner and the fiasco at the public works department where \$100 million disappeared for little or no value, according to the Auditor General.

A bunch of money disappeared for little or no value at the Privacy Commissioner's office. He broke the rules. Public works broke the rules. The Privacy Commissioner lost his job; however, no one stood up and apologized in the House for the mess that happened over there. No one has stood up and given any apology for the mess at public works. It is important that Canadians realize that it was not just a single isolated issue at public works under the sponsorship program. There are more issues.

That is why I want to have concurrence in this report, so that we can tell Canadians that this is not an isolated incident. We are finding more of these all the time. We found it with the president of Canada Post who was cheating on his expense accounts. We find it in the sponsorship program where bags of cash were going back to the Liberal Party to finance elections. We find it in the political appointees of Liberal friends at the office of the Privacy Commissioner. It is everywhere we turn and Canadians need to know that.

Hon. Don Boudria: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry, but I do not think Canadians would be satisfied with that answer. The hon. member told us that he is trying to demonstrate that there was inappropriate

action. We will let Judge Gomery decide what was right and wrong as opposed to every single allegation made by the hon. member.

However, if I seize what the hon. member said, he gave the example that the case involving the former Privacy Commissioner was, in his view, similar to what had occurred or is purported to have occurred regarding that which is the subject of the Gomery inquiry. There are two things wrong with that. First, I do not believe that anything similar was ever levelled at the officer of Parliament in question, and second, the individual in question is not and was not a government employee. He was an officer of this place.

Then, to remind the hon. member that he, like I, voted in the House for the individual to become an officer of the House. Does he not recognize that?

• (1525)

Mr. John Williams: Mr. Speaker, the member seems to have a difficult time in understanding the similarity between the Privacy Commissioner and the sponsorship inquiry. They both broke every rule in the book. They were both reported on by the Auditor General. Both contained illegalities, both contained irregularities, and both contained abusive spending authorities, and nobody has apologized. How more consistent can it be? The point is that it is everywhere we turn. That is what I am trying to say.

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have an amendment to make, seconded by my hon. colleague the whip of the official opposition, the member for Niagara Falls. I move:

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 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 that the Government resign because of its failure to address the deficiencies in governance of the public service addressed in the report.

Hon. Don Boudria: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member, who has moved his motion and you will bring it to the attention of the House in a moment I suspect, talks about the government resigning because it has failed in its responsibility for the administration of the government. The report is not about the government; it is about an officer of Parliament. It is not about the government at all.

Everyone recognizes that. The individual in question is not an individual who works for the government. The point raised by the hon. member and his motion to amend the report to give that particular instruction is out of order because it is not what is in the original report. The report has no reference to an employee of the government in it at all. It is a different topic. This is about an officer of Parliament as everyone around here I suspect probably knows.

Mr. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, I will reply to the point of order.

To help you with your deliberation as to the validity of the amendment that I just moved, I would submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that the wording of the amendment is not that different from the wording of the amendment that you ruled in order on Thursday, May 5. I will read that amendment for the hon. member since he wants to contest this:

Routine Proceedings

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.

Mr. Speaker, you said during your ruling on May 5:

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.

That is important because the 1926 motion was considered a motion of censure which, as you know, Mr. Speaker, is another way of saying a motion of confidence. If the amendment to the third report of the finance committee is “not markedly different”, your words, Mr. Speaker, from the 1926 motion, then the government's claim that it is not a matter of confidence is false. That would also apply to this amendment to the first report of the public accounts committee. It reads:

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 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 that the Government resign because of its failure to address the deficiencies in governance of the public service addressed in the report.

The similarities to the amendment to the third report of the finance committee is obvious. They are both motions that express a loss of confidence in the government. If the majority of members vote for such a motion, then obviously the majority would like this government to resign. It is only worded to send a report back to committee because this is the only vehicle available to the opposition to get an expression of confidence on the floor of the House of Commons.

Citation 168 of Beauchesne's sixth edition states:

—matters of confidence should at all times be clearly subject to political determination...and should not be prescribed in the rules.

Of course the matter of confidence is not part of our rules, so how can the government claim that any amendment to a concurrence motion is not a matter of confidence if there are no rules to govern it?

If our practice is that a matter of confidence is a political determination, then I would argue that if all members who voted for this amendment were to claim that they considered it a matter of confidence, then that would be political determination. They have determined that the government should resign.

On another issue, the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell seems to be making the statement that somehow it is not contained in the committee response. The argument that the government response is anything to do with the admissibility of the amendment, I would submit, is ridiculous. Governments are notorious for ignoring the recommendations of reports from committees. Just because the government does not talk about a specific aspect of a report does not

preclude an amendment from addressing that aspect. After all, it is an amendment to the report, not the response.

● (1530)

The Speaker: The Chair has had a look at the amendment proposed by the hon. member for Prince George—Peace River. I have heard his arguments and those of the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell. I will take the matter under advisement and get back to the House shortly with respect to the admissibility of the amendment.

Hon. Robert Thibault (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to participate in the debate on the concurrence motion before us today and to respond formally to the first report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts which addresses the report on the audit of the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada.

Two years ago the government relied on the early investigation work of the government operations and estimates committee and the Office of the Auditor General to address weaknesses in the management of the Office of the Privacy Commissioner. Their work was crucial to quickly identify the issues at hand and the extent and nature of the situation. Both bodies have been key in enabling the government to take appropriate action.

I want to reassure the House that the government reacted quickly to recommendations that came out of the auditor general's report in September 2003. We accepted the recommendations and acted upon them.

The government's response to the committee's first report regarding the matter of the Office of the Privacy Commissioner has been very positive. We tabled our response on March 23, 2005 responding to each of the committee's 20 recommendations. The recommendations are aimed directly at the departments and agencies that provide oversight to government departments and agencies, including Treasury Board Secretariat, the Privy Council Office, the Public Service Commission and the Public Service Human Resources Management Agency of Canada.

I will speak to recommendations Nos. 7 through 16, which affect Treasury Board Secretariat specifically and the actions that the secretariat is taking.

In recommendation No. 7, the committee recommended that the secretariat improve monitoring of compliance, which we committed to doing in budget 2004, in the “Strengthening Public Sector Management” booklet, by re-establishing the office of the comptroller general of Canada within Treasury Board Secretariat and finally, by issuing the management accountability framework, MAF.

Through these vehicles Treasury Board Secretariat has implemented broad measures to strengthen accountability and compliance across the public sector. The management accountability framework, for example, was issued in June 2003. The MAF is designed to translate the vision of modern public service management as established in “Results for Canadians” into a set of management expectations.

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Treasury Board Secretariat is developing mechanisms to annually assess and monitor progress in the achievement of MAF expectations by departments and agencies. The secretariat is working with departments and agencies to establish a base line for management and agreeing on common indicators of effective management performance. It is conducting regular bilateral meetings between the secretary of the Treasury Board, deputy ministers and heads of agencies to discuss the performance of their organizations against MAF expectations. It is conducting annual assessments of departments and agencies. It is producing an annual report to Parliament on the public service and its management.

The committee recommended that the secretariat intervene in a timely manner when instances of non-compliance arise. That was recommendation No. 9.

The secretariat is working to enhance its existing oversight and monitoring role to become aware as early as possible of control deficiencies or compliance issues, while respecting the accountability regime of the public service, which confers responsibility and accountability with deputy heads.

The committee requested that the secretariat develop a detailed action plan to focus more attention on compliance with Treasury Board policies in smaller departments and agencies. That was recommendation No. 11.

Since the Office of the Auditor General published its report on the Office of the Privacy Commissioner in September 2003, Treasury Board Secretariat, in partnership with departments, has continued to strengthen a system of monitoring smaller departments and agencies.

• (1535)

For example, Treasury Board Secretariat maintains an ongoing dialogue with departments, including the smaller departments and agencies, through the management accountability framework. The secretariat has also created a dedicated group to increase communications, support and oversight of smaller departments and agencies.

This approach reflects the balance between departmental accountability for ensuring that an adequate management control framework is in place within smaller departments and agencies to manage the risks associated with their activities and the secretariat's role of selective oversight based on risk and capacity.

With respect to oversight relating to the secretariat's contracting policy, the committee has recommended that the secretariat "fulfill all of its responsibilities in the area of contracting, as set forth under section 5.1 of the contracting policy", which is recommendation No. 14, and that it, "include measures to improve the monitoring of contracting activities".

In 2003 the secretariat amended and expanded the oversight activities described in the contracting policy. Most notably, the government now publicly discloses on the Internet procurement contracts worth more than \$10,000. In addition, senior government officials and political staff are required to publicly disclose their travel and hospitality expenses on the Internet on a quarterly basis.

The committee has stressed the importance of improving the internal audit services for small departments and agencies, and the government agrees.

In the past two years the government re-established the Comptroller General of Canada within Treasury Board Secretariat. It has also put in place stronger financial controls to ensure the rigorous stewardship of public funds.

On November 18, 2004 the President of the Treasury Board announced a multi-year initiative to strengthen the internal audit function across the federal government. The multi-year initiative will enhance the internal audit capacity across the public sector and introduce standardized, proven audit processes.

A key component of the announcement was that the comptroller general's office focus on internal audit services for small departments and agencies that have limited or no internal audit resources. This was the case within the Office of the Privacy Commissioner. These include: plans to appoint professionally accredited comptrollers to sign off on all new spending initiatives; bolstering the internal audit function on a government-wide basis; the development of enterprise-wide systems to track all spending and other tools for effective scrutiny and decision making; and the commitment to audit all annual financial statements of departments and agencies within five years.

That is a broad approach across all of government to ensure that the moneys are used for the purposes for which they were voted. The committee has done a lot of good work, and the government is responding.

I will now turn to two recommendations, Nos. 8 and 10, where the secretariat is unable to accept fully the recommendations put forth by the committee due to cabinet confidence and accountability considerations, respectively.

In recommendation No. 8, the committee suggests "Parliament be informed of any exemption from Treasury Board policies extended to entities listed in schedule I.1, sections 2 and 3, of the Financial Administration Act, and the reasons for such exemption".

Treasury Board Secretariat will, upon Parliament's request, report on exemptions to the extent that it can without revealing information that constitutes a cabinet confidence. I believe this fully meets the spirit of the recommendation and gives Parliament what it really needs.

In the case of recommendation No. 10 where the committee suggests that the secretariat report all instances where "it has had to intervene to ensure compliance with TB policies", the government cannot fully implement the recommendation. The recommendation includes the requirement for the secretariat to reveal in its departmental performance report the name of the institution involved, the nature of the breach and the corrective measures taken.

• (1540)

Departments and agencies must be accountable for reporting on the performance of these organizations, including the results they achieve as well as the actions they take to address identified deficiencies. These are to be reported in their departmental performance reports as required by the Treasury Board Secretariat.

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The secretariat's decisions to take further oversight action or to intervene are based on judgment, taking into consideration the issues associated with a particular situation, the nature of the risks and the actions of the department in taking early and effective remedial action.

Independent of the reports we have received from the Auditor General and the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, the government has made great strides in improving its internal audit and oversight functions. It has done this with the goal of improving public sector management for the benefit of all government departments and agencies, no matter how big, no matter how small.

Before closing, I must thank the members of the government operations and estimates committee and the Office of the Auditor General for their contributions regarding this matter. The work that was done by the government operations and estimates committee, the Auditor General and now the Standing Committee on Public Accounts has proven that the parliamentary process is alive and well. Parliament continues to have a strong role in holding the government to account.

I would also like to commend the work of the Privacy Commissioner and her team. We have spent countless hours working with the commissioner, Jennifer Stoddart, and her team of professionals over the past two years. They have been extremely cooperative and helpful in finding solutions.

By sharing the responsibility for both the positive and the negative aspects of the machinery of government, the Government of Canada, Parliament and the Office of the Privacy Commissioner have proven their commitment to greater accountability and transparency.

The Government of Canada will continue its work. It will continue to move forward in a constructive way for the benefit of all Canadians.

We know that sometimes parliamentarians are frustrated by the amount of time it takes to get action on a program, a project or an initiative of government. We know that approvals are slow to come. We blame the bureaucracy. Citizens might even blame parliamentarians.

However, it is important when we are dealing with taxpayers' money that there be transparencies and checks and balances. We know when those fail how catastrophic or how difficult it can be for the public to understand. We can find through the ages many examples of systems that were not completely in place or completely followed.

As for the initiative of establishing the comptroller general function to ensure, particularly in new spending programs, that the systems are consistent with the Financial Administration Act, with Treasury Board guidelines, and that they achieve for the people what the money was set out to do, I think that is very, very important.

It is important also that organizations and officers of Parliament like the Auditor General be fully independent and well financed and that there be a method to work with Parliament to ensure that the resources are there for those organizations so they can do their jobs. At the same time, we as Canadians do not want the machinery of government to grow so big and so cumbersome that it does not do

what it is supposed to do for a reasonable amount. There is always a bit of give and take.

If we look at the committee's recommendations and the way they have been implemented by the government, I think we will see that we are meeting this for Canadians. We are making sure that we have the systems in place.

Again let me say that sometimes it is cumbersome and sometimes it is slow. Many times I am frustrated in my work as a parliamentarian when I am waiting for the Treasury Board Secretariat to go through its due diligence, to do its work prior to a minister being able to advance on a budget area or a new program of government so that we can assist in the communities and do the work of government, but we have to understand that. We have to make sure.

● (1545)

Yes, it is expensive. It adds cost to governance, but it also includes transparency.

It might be difficult for Canadians to recognize what it is to administer programs and services across this vast land in an area in the amount of \$200 billion. They assume sometimes that the finance minister sits at the table, writes the cheques and follows the programs.

That is impossible in our system. It is too big. There are many departments and agencies. There is work in cooperation with the provincial governments, with municipalities and with independent agencies, so it is important that the bureaucracy be able to manage the finances in accordance with the orders given by Parliament in the budget and in all other programs.

What we have to see happen is that any time we have a failing, any time where we see that it is not done right, we have to implement new systems or change our systems so that we never have those kinds of occurrences again.

I think we all know of one example, which we are studying in depth now. The commissioner is looking at all the elements and will be making recommendations. We know there have been no problems in the last four years. This was a program that had problems. The problems were fixed. Eventually the program was cancelled and a lot of action was taken in light of what we have learned already.

However, it is going to be important that we review completely the recommendations that will be coming forward to see if there are additional things we must do.

The comptroller function is very important as administered by the departmental comptrollers through the Treasury Board Secretariat and the Comptroller General, but also in working with smaller agencies that might not have those capabilities. We take care of that. We make sure that the office works and helps to do internal audits.

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Quite often we can find the problems early with internal audits. As well, with a good control function we can make sure that we do not multiply the mistakes and that we have a transparent system in place so that Canadians can understand how their money is used, how Parliament decides what the priorities are for Canadians, and what systems are in place for putting action to those recommendations and controlling the costs in a reasonable manner. Canadians should be able to know.

When we look at contracting above \$10,000, we see that Canadian small businesses across the country have a chance to participate in government programs. Sometimes this can be a very good boost to small businesses and bring them to the medium level and perhaps to a larger one. They have access to the amount of money I mentioned, the \$200 billion a year total that government expends within the country, a lot of it in the military, a lot of it in health, a lot of it in the various parts in education and transfers to various regions, but a lot of it in public works.

In Atlantic Canada, one of the elements of public works that is very important to us is wharf construction: harbours. We all know of examples where things have not gone as they should. In my community, there is the port of Digby. It is very important to me that this port be returned to the community. Now, if we had had all the measures in place and a proper comptroller function at the time, perhaps that would not ever have happened.

Perhaps an internal audit would have suggested that it was not the best way to allocate resources, both financial and infrastructure, such as the board managed by a group that had no interest in that community and did not intend or has not shown any desire to meet the commitments that government intended with that facility.

That cost a lot of money. That cost a lot of pain. In an instance like this we are in a position now where we must find a way to bring that facility back into the hands and control of the community. Certainly I believe it will mean that the federal government will have to make an investment with the community in bringing that port back to a facility that can meet its original intention, which the federal government wanted.

• (1550)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak to this report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, especially since I had the pleasure and privilege of sitting on this committee for nearly 18 months before the 1997 election. I want to take this opportunity to congratulate the standing committee on the work it has accomplished, and particularly my two colleagues from the Bloc Québécois who are members of that committee: the hon. member for Jonquière—Alma and the hon. member for Repentigny.

We know that the report before us is raising a very serious question about the government's lax attitude with respect to former privacy commissioner George Radwanski, who, incidentally, was a good Liberal; he was appointed by the Liberal Party, through Prime Minister Chrétien. His allegiance to the Liberal Party was undeniable, and the same was true of most mandarins in the public service and government organizations.

We can remember serious management problems. For instance, Mr. Radwanski had a quasi dictatorial management relationship with his staff. His expense accounts showed he had been very frugal. As we know, the funding for the expense account of the president of a crown corporation or an organization like the Office of the Privacy Commissioner comes from the taxpayers.

We notice that the individuals appointed to these positions get so involved in the organization that they come to consider the funds as their own. The arrogant in chief and former Canada Post chairman, André Ouellet, testified before the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. This individual showed unbelievable nepotism. He kept hiring members of his family; I counted 34 such hirings.

When he testified before the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, Mr. Ouellet took exception to the fact that I, as a parliamentarian, would dare to question him on his expense account. I told him he should not forget that he was managing the Canada Post Corporation. The shareholders of that corporation are not André Ouellet and his friends, or the friends of the Liberal Party: they are the taxpayers, the citizens who file income tax returns and who feel they are paying too much for the services they are getting. Indeed, they are not getting their money's worth.

Madam Speaker, I am convinced that, over the weekend, you spent time in your riding. My Bloc Québécois colleagues have a reputation for being present in their ridings, and for being hard working. I am convinced that, like me, they took part in various activities and met people at the shopping mall, the grocery store, or at meetings organized by social groups such as the Kiwanis Club, the Knights of Columbus, the Cercle des fermières, or seniors' groups. This is our trademark: every Bloc Québécois member is close to ordinary people.

• (1555)

Bloc Québécois members are not visible only during an election campaign. They are present all year round. It so happens that, these days, Bloc Québécois members are often told about an issue—

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I regret interrupting the member. I am now prepared to rule on point of order raised by the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell on the admissibility of the amendment from the member for Prince George—Peace River.

[*English*]

I have reviewed the report of the public accounts committee in question, the first report, which really is a repeat of the fourth report of the said committee from the previous Parliament. I am satisfied it appears that it deals with issues concerning public service governance of the Office of the Privacy Commissioner and other issues surrounding governance of other offices. Therefore, I am satisfied the amendment appears to be in order and I propose to put it to the House.

The question is on the amendment.

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[Translation]

The hon. member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord has the floor and he has 14 minutes to finish his comments.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

The House resumed consideration of the motion and of the amendment.

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for that excellent decision. In any case, this is additional motivation for me. I was already motivated in my first six minutes but, since we were talking about Mr. Radwanski's management, I thought my colleagues might find that the Liberal Party's mismanagement has been somewhat excessive.

Now, this leads me to the heart of the problem, particularly since the Chair ruled that this government should resign because of its mismanagement of public funds. This is the kind of amendment you have just ruled admissible.

We have before us a government that is barely hanging on to power. Our comments will be precautionary: there will be a vote on this amendment and on this motion.

Last week, during a scum, the leader of the government tried to cloud the issue with age-old tactic of diversion. He was smiling, even arrogant and smug, if not insignificant. However, I know that the Chair would not allow me to call the leader of the government insignificant, because I still respect him. The comments he made during the scum were arrogant. He said that this does not bother them and that, in any event, it is not a confidence vote. They have decided that this does not qualify as a vote of non-confidence.

I am sorry, but if the amendment that was just ruled in order says that the government should resign—this is an unofficial translation, Madam Speaker, since I am not as bilingual as you are—because of its failure to address deficiencies in governance of the public service, how can that not be considered to be a confidence vote?

Nobody believes that. That just does not cut it. Anyone who read the papers last weekend could see that serious journalists who do in-depth research recognize that the government will not be able to escape this because it is indeed a confidence vote. The government had better start preparing right now to cling to power as best it can. The Liberal government must recognize that the moment of truth has come.

The fact that the amendment has been ruled in order confirms that if the government loses this vote, it loses its authority to govern, period. The Prime Minister must go back to the Governor General and resign. We must have an election. In any case, this government no longer has the moral authority to govern.

It is not surprising to see the government of this Prime Minister act this way because we have seen a lot of procedural wrangling over the past two or three weeks to try to delay the inevitable. The verdict is in: this government no longer has the moral authority to govern

and it must not cling to power. If it thinks it has a good record to offer, all it has to do is run on that record and let the people decide.

There is a sacred principle in democracy: the people are always right; they are never wrong. We, the 308 members, must be respectful of those who elected us regardless of the party we represent. We must validate our mandate.

If the government is sure of itself, then it can go to the people to ask them if they are satisfied with all this abuse and scandal that we hear about every day at the Gomery commission.

● (1600)

The Liberals tried to sell Quebeckers on the beauty of Canada by ramming it down their throats. If they could have done it even more forcefully, they would have. This reminds me of Normand Brathwaite's Réno-Dépôt ads, saying, "If It existed, we'd have it". If there were a machine to ram the beauty of Canada down our throats, they would sell it.

That is what the government tried to do, that is, to steal the result of the referendum in a democratic way. Three days before the referendum, they held this beautiful love-in in Montreal, to tell us how much they loved us and how nice we were. True, the rest of Canada likes Quebec, when it is on its knees. However, it so happens that we are standing up.

Quebeckers will show this government that, after all that has come out of the Gomery commission so far, they are immune to fear. Scaremongering no longer works. Even if this government showered Quebeckers with billions of dollars, it would no longer work in 2005.

Now, on the eve of the election, I predict the Liberals will once again try to buy votes in the regions with the employment insurance issue. In government back rooms, in the Langevin building, at the PMO, they will try to concoct transitional measures to make the unemployed and the seasonal workers believe that the Liberal government is there for them. No one believes them anymore. They tried that tactic in 1997, 2000 and 2004 and they failed. They need not try it again.

If this government were honest, it would ask the public if it were in favour of this. It could also talk about this with my friends in other provinces, where people are starting to wake up. Canadians from the other provinces are realizing that this party is corrupt. To those watching us who do not live in Quebec, I would say this is not a Quebec scandal, but a Liberal Party scandal. That is not how politics are done in Quebec. Do not put us all in the same boat. But it is how the Liberal Party does things.

Every day, the testimony becomes increasingly damning. Again today, Benoît Corbeil, former director general of the Quebec wing of the Liberal Party of Canada, this governing party, gave us his take on the brown envelopes. Some tens and hundreds of thousands of dollars were handed out.

Routine Proceedings

I remember the 2000 election; I was campaigning. We were inundated with Liberal ads and billboards in every little media outlet. We wondered where they got the money to do that. We ran an honest campaign and could not afford to match them. The money it takes to run a campaign, some \$75,000 to \$80,000, we collect in sums of \$5, \$10 or \$20 from average citizens. When the campaign is over, unlike the Liberals, we owe nothing to big companies like Petro Canada. Our campaign is accountable to average people who elected the members of the Bloc Québécois. That is the difference between us and the Liberal Party.

In closing, Quebecers will be able to pass judgment on this government's record at the polls. The government should be punished by the people of Quebec. The Liberal government's days are numbered.

•(1605)

[*English*]

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is interesting that the separatists devote their work to separating Quebec from the rest of Canada. It would be helpful if they would devote the same level of energy to separating fact from allegations. The fact is that much of what he has spoken to represents allegations, much of which have been contradicted by other individuals testifying before Gomery.

What is more important is to recognize that there also have been allegations against the Parti Québécois, the Bloc separatist cousins in the province of Quebec, that money was received inappropriately, that contracts were granted based on the receipt of that inappropriate money and that the money helped four to five separatist efforts during the referendum effort.

They think that it is only dirty money if it goes to federalists but the fact is that dirty money is dirty money. There have been allegations of dirty money received and contract interference under the Conservative government that preceded this Liberal government. There are allegations of contract interference and dirty money with the Bloc Québécois.

Let us recognize that these allegations are just that and that the fair thing for all of us to do—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

•(1610)

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): Order, please. We would appreciate some decorum in the House. I would call on the members to please conduct themselves as members of Parliament.

Hon. Scott Brison: Madam Speaker, the fact is that we have had allegations against the Conservatives at Gomery. We have had allegations against the separatists at Gomery.

What we all ought to be doing is supporting the work of Justice Gomery such that Justice Gomery can review all the testimony and get to the truth for Canadians. That would be the responsible thing to do.

Canadians in Quebec and across Canada understand that the types of activities being alleged are wrong, disgusting and cross partisan stripes. This is across parties and this type of activity has gone on far too long.

It is because of the work of one Prime Minister, the Liberal Prime Minister, who actually had the guts to stand up and get to the truth and support Justice Gomery and change the culture of the government for generations.

[*Translation*]

If it is possible to change the culture of government, it would be worth doing.

[*English*]

What they ought to be doing over there is standing up with Canadians who want to see us change the culture of government and support the Prime Minister, the only leader in the House of Commons who has had the courage to do the right thing.

They have to realize that just because the dirty money goes to the separatists does not clean it. The fact is that dirty money is dirty money and it is all wrong, and we will get to the bottom of it. The Conservatives and the Bloc should be supporting the Prime Minister, the Liberal Prime Minister, who is doing the right thing to make sure this never happens again.

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake, Correctional Service Canada; the hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas, Citizenship and Immigration; the hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, National Defence.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. We have been talking in this House about decorum and respect over the last little while and a lot of the discourse has been coming from the other side of the House. I would just like to say that I have heard the most disrespectful things I have ever heard in this House since I have been here in the last two years.

I would like the member for Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour to apologize to the minister for those absolutely unbelievable comments. I would like him to withdraw them and apologize.

•(1615)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond: Madam Speaker, I rise on the same point of order. The argument over who started it and who added to it will begin. My colleague said some things that, incidentally, were not unparliamentary. He reacted strongly when the Minister of Public Works and Government Services began accusing the Bloc Québécois of having taken dirty money. I would remind you as well as the minister that, on April 4, Justice Gomery—

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): Order, please. I do not think the Canadian public would like to see what is happening here. We will check the blues and get back to the member. In the thrush of the back and forth, the Chair missed the expressions that the member has called unparliamentary.

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We will now continue with questions and comments with a response from the member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Cote-Nord.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond: Madam Speaker, I will complete my sentence calmly. On April 4, Justice Gomery declared that the Bloc Québécois had not received any dirty money from the sponsorship scandal and had nothing to be ashamed of in this matter.

Hon. Scott Brison: Oh, oh!

Mr. Michel Guimond: You ought perhaps to tell the Minister of Public Works and Government Services to cool down. I would like to remind this minister of flip flops of something. When he lost the Conservative leadership race, he converted to the Liberal Party out of spite, disgust and disaffection. His fellow party members should seriously question this minister's fidelity to their party.

If he had won the Conservative leadership race, he would still be on this side, so I do not want to hear any lectures from Mr. Flip-flop.

Second, regarding his reference to separatists, I would remind him that during the Montreal love-in, Canadian Airlines offered round trip flights from Vancouver to Montreal for \$99. That amount does not even cover the cost of fuel and operation of the plane. Where did the difference between the price charged and the real cost come from? Once again, the secret Liberal fund. We have seen that.

Lastly, the minister delights in badmouthing the separatists, and complaining about us, so why not let us leave? We want to leave. We want to leave Canada. So let us. If Quebec is a millstone around the neck of the rest of Canada, as the member from Nova Scotia has said, then let us go. That is exactly what we want. We want no more to do with you.

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate my hon. colleague on his relevant speech and arguments.

I have to say, however, that I am very disappointed with the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, who is not bringing his department under control and not realizing the terrible mistakes that have been made, particularly with respect to money laundering and the dirty money his party has received. Instead of announcing that he will be aggressively taking action in his capacity as the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, he has been parroting the same line for the past few months. I am very disappointed to see a minister act this way.

Moreover, the Bloc Québécois, as well as the Parti Québécois, have been accused of receiving dirty money, when the investigation conducted at the provincial level showed that \$22,000 was donated by individuals working for certain firms, and the Parti Québécois immediately put the money in a trust account pending the completion of the investigation.

Why does the government not put the millions of dollars it received in a trust account, as the Parti Québécois did? In this respect, the Liberal argumentation is very shaky. To defend themselves, they are down to accusing a provincial party and a federal one, which had absolutely nothing to do with the sponsorship scandal.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague who made brilliant remarks earlier whether he is getting the impression that the Liberals are playing for time. They contend that we should not have an election. One year ago, they wanted to have one and did call one, arguing that enough was known about the sponsorships.

In their opinion, the people are not prepared to go to the polls. In that case, why did the Chrétien government call an election for no reason whatsoever three years and three months after it was voted in with a majority? The Chrétien government had the majority in the House, but called an election three times over ten years.

Did the government consult the public on whether it was appropriate to have an election?

• (1620)

Mr. Michel Guimond: Madam Speaker, hon. members will have understood that, earlier, when I said the Minister of Public Works and Government Services had sought the leadership of a party, I was not referring to the leadership of the Liberal Party, but of the Conservative Party. He later crossed the floor to join the Liberals.

I want to reply to the question of the hon. member for Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour. He is absolutely right. In any case, this government no longer has the moral authority to govern. When he addressed the nation on all the television networks, the Prime Minister said he was sorry. He made a commitment to hold an election in January 2006. But that was just to buy time. People want an election now. Quebeckers want to punish this government.

[*English*]

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Madam Speaker, I intend to use the next 20 minutes to try and calm the House down by being very boring. Perhaps that is some of the flavour that the House could use at this time.

In that regard, I will open my comments by addressing what we are supposed to be talking about, as opposed to screaming at each other. We are dealing with the first report of Standing Committee on Public Accounts on the audit and the financial management and the government's response to that, in particular with regard to the recommendations contained in that report regarding the Privacy Commissioner.

We all know of the abuse that went on and that was perpetrated by the prior privacy commissioner, both with regard to financial mismanagement and misuse of government funds and also with regard to the conduct and the way he treated his staff.

There are a total of 20 recommendations contained in the report. We have in front of us today the response by the government. In fact, the recommendations go some distance to deal with the abuse which we saw at that time. These are recommendations that I believe all members of the House from all parties accept as being needed in the sense of getting a proper response from the government.

It seems to me that we have heard from the parliamentary secretary today the government's response, enunciating that in some respects the government is accepting most of the recommendations, some of which have already begun to be implemented.

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It is not a situation of which any of us can be proud. It was allowed to develop. We were not as diligent as I suppose we should have been as members of Parliament, as the conduct of the privacy commissioner got out of hand. We did get a hold of it.

I want to recognize the work that the public accounts committee did in preparing the report and the recommendation. They are recommendations that we should all accept and that the government or future governments should fully implement.

In particular there are recommendations with regard to the work that the Treasury Board should do. In terms of some of the response that we have had from the chair of the Treasury Board, I am a bit concerned about whether implementation will be carried out not only in actuality, but also in the spirit of those recommendations. I must admit I have some reservations that the chair of the Treasury Board has resisted, at least in spirit, the recommendations. This is something that again will have to be monitored both by the public accounts committee and by the House as a whole.

On the conduct of government officials, and some of this spills over to the issue we are dealing with in the sponsorship scandal, the conduct of the former privacy commissioner reflects an arrogance that also shows up in the sponsorship scandal. The recommendations in the report are also ones that hopefully would act as guidance with regard to the use of any funds being administered by the government or future governments.

The report has some very strong recommendations as to how people should conduct themselves, both in government, that is as elected members, and as individuals who are public servants. The attitude of arrogance that we saw from the former privacy commissioner is one which badly needs to be condemned. This attitude should not be emulated by any member here.

I wonder, Madam Speaker, if I could have the consideration of the other members of the House? If they want to carry on conversations perhaps they could move outside. I am being boring and if they want to leave the House, I would welcome them to do that and carry on their debate outside, if it could be so characterized.

With regard to the sponsorship scandal, some rules are being set out. I believe if we followed them across government agencies, departments and individuals, we would not see a repeat of the type of scandal we have seen.

• (1625)

The other point I want to address is this. The accusations flying about has led to the amendment as proposed by the Conservatives. We, as a party, are unable to support the amendment, and I want to address a few comments to that.

Speaking on behalf of my party, I want to be very clear why we are unable to accept the amendment and why we will vote against it. Part of it has to do with the process. It is very dangerous for the House at any time to give directions to any committee to the degree that has been proposed in the amendment. We have tried, and I believe we should be working more extensively on this, to provide greater independence to the committees, the standing committees in particular, and not direct them with the type of rigidity that I believe the Conservative Party is attempting to do.

We are trying to increase the democracy within the House of Commons and its committees and the amendment would have the impact of doing the opposite, if it passed and was carried out by the public accounts committee. We would be setting a dangerous precedent. On that almost procedural type of argument, we will be speaking against it.

Second, we will oppose it on the basis that we have made it very clear to the House and the country as a whole that we want the opportunity for the House to review, debate and pass a budget before an election. The content of the amendment and the intent of the mover and his party is to get the amendment back before the House at the earliest possible time for a vote and to treat that as a non-confidence vote. We believe the Canadians have made it very clear that they want this budget and the terms in it put in place and implemented. They do not want an election at this time, not until at least that event takes place. Seeing as the amendment is designed to end the sitting of the House and the government, we will, at this period of time, vote against it.

• (1630)

Hon. Peter Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak to this motion and perhaps return us to where we are.

I, for one, have the greatest respect for the role of committees in this system. I have been chair of two major committees, and I took both of those roles seriously. I like the fact that in recent years committees have been strengthened. That means not only the government in general but the House, I would like to think, take the role of committees more seriously. It is quite clear to me that the motion of the member for Edmonton—St. Albert's that the first report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts be concurred in is one that we should support.

We on this side of the House take the recommendations of any committee, particularly the committee of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, seriously. On March 23, the government tabled its responses to the committee report in question. As that response shows, all parties concerned, the President of the Treasury Board, the President of the Privy Council Office and the Public Service Commission have listened closely to the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. As a government, we have taken action and we continue to take action to respond to the recommendations of the report.

First, the Treasury Board Secretariat hired an outside consultant to assess the management practices of the office of the Privacy Commissioner and propose improvements. The recommended actions in this study were shared with the office of the Privacy Commissioner.

Second, the secretariat commissioned a case study and survey of the office of the Privacy Commissioner's staff concerning why they did not report any wrongdoing under the Policy on the Internal Disclosure of Information Concerning Wrongdoing in the Workplace or why they did not seek the assistance of the Public Service Integrity Officer.

Third, the secretariat provided advice to the interim commissioner on discipline and recovery action.

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Fourth, the secretariat helped identify new management staff and advisers for the office of the Privacy Commissioner.

These are the actions of a secretariat, which is taking the report of a standing committee of this House seriously.

Upon the release of the report of the Auditor General in September 2003, the President of the Treasury Board committed to a series of actions in respect to the office of the Privacy Commissioner. These actions covered a wide spectrum, including the performance management program for executives, classification of position, hospitality expenses, vacation leave cash outs, whistleblowing, travel expenditures and financial management.

However, our actions to enhance transparency and accountability have not been limited to the office of the Privacy Commissioner. The government is committed to responding to the demands of Canadians for open, transparent and accountable government, and our actions reflect that commitment.

I can give a few examples that I have given to my colleague. In December 2003 we re-established the office of the Comptroller General to strengthen financial management and internal audits. We have increased transparency by requiring that information on travel, hospitality, contracting and reclassification of positions be posted on the Internet on a quarterly basis. In this day and age, what could be more transparent than that?

We recently released the report on the most comprehensive review of Canadian crown corporation governance in 20 years. It contains more than 30 measures to strengthen oversight, management and accountability and, again, to increase transparency.

• (1635)

We have introduced the public servants disclosure protection bill to strengthen the regime for investigating wrongdoing.

Last, we have made improvements to the estimates documents to make it easier for Parliament to hold the government to account. I know that this change in the estimates documentation has been very useful in the standing committee on which I serve at the present time.

In budget 2005, this government reiterated its commitment to strengthening public sector management, including modernizing and improving the public service and strengthening governance and accountability. This is a long term commitment. We are making steady progress.

Let me talk about some of the specifics of the government's response to the report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. I would like to talk about the roles of the Public Service Human Resources Management Agency of Canada and the Canada School of Public Service, the portfolio partners of the secretariat.

Let me start with the agency, the agency with the rather long title, the Public Service Human Resources Management Agency of Canada. I will start with that agency and the subject of performance pay for executives.

The government recognizes the need to produce performance pay guidelines that are accessible, visible and based on the principle of sound management of public funds. In March 2005, the Public Service Human Resources Management Agency of Canada

published the new performance management program guidelines for the year 2004-05. These guidelines set out the provisions relating to the performance bonus and they take into account the principle of sound management of public funds.

The agency also recognizes the need to increase the transparency of salary payments made within the framework of the performance management program. The agency now publishes on its website detailed results of the performance management program for all departments and agencies. Again, and I believe this very strongly, let me say that the more we can get the details of government out in public on these websites, the more efficient it is and the less likely it is that there will be slipshod management or wrongdoing.

Subject to certain restrictions in the Privacy Act, the following information will be made public, by department and agency: the total number of senior executives employed, the value of bonuses awarded, and the number and proportion of those who received a performance bonus.

Now I would like to address the recommendations regarding training for governor in council appointees. Again, we are talking about the recommendations of a standing committee of the House, the public accounts committee. The Canada School of Public Service has developed an orientation and continuous learning program for heads of agencies that addresses all of the required learning elements recommended by the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. The first offering of this program was on February 23 and 24 of this year.

The school will conduct regular course assessments to ensure that the continuous learning requirements of agency heads are being met. It will also make available information on the number of appointees trained as well as any changes made to the program itself.

The Privy Council Office will further support the learning needs of newly appointed agency heads by offering a mentoring program.

Crown corporations have a different governance regime than agencies do. Therefore, there are several components of the orientation and continuous learning program for agency heads that do not apply to the chief executive officers of crown corporations.

• (1640)

The Privy Council and the Treasury Board Secretariat have tailored a two day orientation session on corporate governance for newly appointed chief executive officers and directors of crown corporations. These sessions focus on: duties and responsibilities of directors; values and ethics; principles of corporate governance; and public policy environment and accountability framework for crown corporations.

In addition, the CEOs of crown corporations are offered personalized bilateral orientation sessions by the Privy Council Office and other central agencies.

I would like to point out how thoroughly this addresses the recommendations that were in the report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

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These are just some of the actions this government has taken in response to the reports of the Auditor General and the public accounts committee.

We want to offer Canadians the best public service possible. We are working to strengthen trust, accountability and the value for money that Canadians receive from their government.

I appreciate the work of the public accounts committee in helping the government to strengthen public sector management and I am pleased to support this motion.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I wholeheartedly agree with my hon. colleague's comments about the level of transparency we are striving for; one of the main reasons I entered politics was to do this. I always thought that the best way to governance was through efficiencies and transparency and I commend my colleague for his comments.

I want to touch upon recommendations 17 and 18 and the Canada School of Public Service. This intrigues me. The school has developed an orientation and continuous learning program for heads of agencies. I notice that there are three modules and the agency outlines how it plans to do this. I find that this does play into the fact that we are achieving more transparency in this program. I would like my hon. colleague to comment on that, please.

• (1645)

Hon. Peter Adams: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the comments and the question from my colleague from Newfoundland.

Recommendations 17 and 18, which are the training of appointees recommendations that our public accounts committee made, are critical to this process. We want the most effective people in these agencies we can possibly have, and for all governor in council appointments we want really top class and well qualified people, but even the most well qualified person outside of the appointment needs training when he or she receives the appointment. The committee made recommendations for that.

I have mentioned the orientation and continuous learning program for heads of agencies. This is designed to address the learning and training requirements identified by the committee. If I may, I will give some sense of it. This is not material that I have actually memorized, but it will give hon. members a sense of this program.

There are three components to this. Module one deals with how the government operates. It includes values, ethics, disclosure and briefings on the Privacy Act and the Access to Information Act, both of which are very important. It includes principles and processes of parliamentary government, federal agencies and the budget process, business planning, expenditure management, and relations with Treasury Board. Thus, module one gives us a sense of how these appointees are going to be trained.

Module two deals with how government manages, which includes the management accountability framework we now have, financial management, human resources management and communications.

Module three is relationship management, which includes lessons learned by former and current heads of agencies, a discussion of the governor in council appointment process itself and the services offered to it and to them by, for example, the Privy Council Office.

There will be regular assessments of these courses to ensure that the continuous learning requirements of the heads of agencies are being met, because naturally the things that I have mentioned change all the time as a result, for example, of actions in this chamber.

At the same time, information will be made available, as I have said, on the number of appointees and any changes made to the program. In answer to my colleague from Newfoundland, that will be made publicly available on websites.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Christian Simard (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Madam Speaker, I will try to pick up where the member opposite left off. He was talking about the transparency of this government in the budgetary process and in all the good things it does.

In my opinion and in the opinion of every Quebecker and every Canadian, what is transparent here is that the government has put morality aside and is trying to stay in power artificially through all kinds of manoeuvres. I refer my colleagues to the article by Chantal Hébert in today's issue of *Le Devoir*. The article is entitled "Governance and Shenanigans". The Liberals are resorting to all kinds of shenanigans to cling to power. We are hearing all sorts of stories involving these people, stories which could unfortunately turn out to be true. There are rumours of confidence votes being bought. We want to have that vote because the government no longer has the confidence of the other parties.

The government has stooped to the point where it is negotiating aid to Africa to stay in power or to get an extra vote when populations that have been neglected until now are still suffering. To get an extra vote, it has decided to help Darfur, which is necessary, but it is doing it in a cynical way. What a shame. What discourages us all from politics, or at least what has shaken my faith, is asking myself if I am a member of the same Parliament as this Prime Minister and this government. The government is exchanging a response to basic needs that so far had been ignored for votes that will help it stay in power. It is doing that to secure the support of the Conservatives and to avoid meeting its obligations.

Even Bono, the singer, a friend of the Prime Minister's, was disappointed with the government's reluctance to honour its commitments. I think that the foreign affairs critic for the Bloc Québécois will certainly agree with what I am saying. Instead of respecting the obligations of a rich country such as ours and devoting enough money to foreign aid, the government has totally ignored foreign aid by not including it in the last budget.

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Piecemeal, small time, this government is transparent in its laxity, its cynicism and its poor politics, which is discouraging to all voters. This approach is not ethical, as we can see. The government is preparing to hold an umpteenth election with dirty sponsorship money rather than act on the request of the majority of the House and implement what, in environmental terms, is called a precautionary principle, a matter of logic. If there are serious allegations, and I think they are, even though the Minister of Public Works and Government Services keeps playing the same tape, the many and serious allegations warrant a minimum of \$2.2 million being put in a trust fund as a precautionary principle. This way, the government would show it is responsible and not mocking the money of taxpayers and low income persons, who are law abiding and pay their taxes.

The government must act with integrity and high moral standards. This government seems incapable of doing so. In order to keep itself in power, it plays leftist and pulls the wool over the eyes of the New Democrat Party, which is dreaming in technicolour. The alliance is wrong. It is a catching bargain, through which the government will seek not a majority, but rather virginity, false morality, a social cast, after seeking a rightist cast through its \$13 billion investment in national defence. This government is continually sniffing about everywhere, in the worst spots, just to satisfy its thirst for power and remain in office, it and its corrupt machine, built over nearly a century in this country.

Public disgust will come out at some point. I think we can feel it here. We want an election to give expression to the disgust of Canadians and Quebecers over this government's actions.

Certainly, transparency is an issue. This government's scam is transparent, as are its dishonesty and the ploy it inspires as it begs for every vote, buying them or promising embassies. The Liberals promise voters that, if they vote Liberal, they will be helping the people suffering in Darfur and the Sudan. But they threaten not to if they do not vote for them.

● (1650)

This sort of behaviour is disgraceful. This government is disgraceful, it lacks morals. It is prepared to buy all the votes, by almost any means. According to the allegations and statements from Gomery, these members, in a pseudo-democratic debate in front of everyone, are showing us the spectacle of a derailed and panicked government. That is why we must be able to vote and express this anger.

How can we trust these people to invest in social housing? How can we trust them to respect and implement the Kyoto protocol, when they can only compromise? I feel sorry for the poor NDP team that sold its platform to the Liberals who will use it for one campaign. This is known as the adopt and discard approach. The Liberals will adopt it for their campaign and, if they are elected, they will throw it in the garbage along with the party that subscribed to it and which will pay a huge price during an election.

I have a lot of respect for the NDP in terms of its social values. Unfortunately, we will never share the centralist fantasy of that party in constitutional terms.

In the committee, I also had respect for sincere individuals who are being royally misled by a prime minister and a government team with a real thirst, not for justice for all nor respect for the jurisdictions and emancipation of local and provincial communities and Quebec, but for staying in power, like some sort of insatiable vampires. It is a disgrace.

With regard to this debate, we will realize that it is time to vote and to turn the page on a government team that lacks the moral fibre needed to claim to govern. Everyone in this country deserves better than the disgraceful shenanigans we are witnessing.

● (1655)

[*English*]

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I was not going to make a comment but in the latter portion of the hon. member's speech I think he betrayed his real intent.

I can understand a member on the other side rising and slagging or criticizing the government. In a sense, that is what opposition members do. They are not all one trick ponies but we have a few around here today.

I can understand why the hon. member might criticize the government in this scenario. I am not saying that the criticism is all justified. I am just saying that I can understand that an opposition member would do it. However it is so politicized that he stopped slagging the government and began slagging another opposition party for the only reason that it decided to try to accomplish some of its priority objectives around here. That is the most politically imbued, sodden position one could take around here.

It is hard to believe that he could forget about all of the terrible things he says are going on. He blames it on the government but then takes the time to slag the New Democratic Party. To me that simply says a thousand things about the political nature of the debate here. It is so political we cannot even get to the substance.

I will pause there and leave the comment hanging. I am sure the member will stand and talk more politics, slag some more, slag again and keep going. He can be my guest. I thought I would make the comment.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Christian Simard: Madam Speaker, I think that the member opposite wandered astray. He must think that he is in the business of selling cars, and used ones at that. That is the kind of morality that is involved. We are in the business of politics and proud to be in that business. I am being criticized for being political when I am a member of Parliament. Perhaps the member does not know what clean, healthy politics is. That is the kind of politics the Bloc Québécois practices.

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Now, to paraphrase an American president, if he cannot stand the heat, he should get out of the kitchen; if he does not like the rules of politics, he should not run again. He is unable to reply to my arguments, except in vague terms. He did not even notice that I actually had rather good words for the New Democratic Party, although not too many for their strategy. With such a strategy, which benefits only the bigger fish of the two, that is, the one that eats the other, that party risks becoming, by its own doing, a political species at risk. Unfortunately, it is possible that nobody will remember that the Layton-Martin agreement, between the leader of the NDP and the Prime Minister was—

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): Order, please. We refer to members in the House either by their title or by their constituency.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Christian Simard: Madam Speaker, I was referring to the name of the agreement, and that is its name, naturally. It is a compound name, the name of the agreement. True, it may not deserve its own name, nor having a lot of time and thought focussed on it. But that is its name.

So the leader of the NDP was on the losing end with this agreement. Unfortunately for him, his party members are going to suffer as a result, because they are going to become pseudo-leftist Liberals for the time it takes for one campaign. We all know that the Liberals pass themselves off as leftist when campaigning, but then govern on the right, by taking the money of the unemployed—a huge amount of money moreover—or the money that belongs to seniors—I am thinking here of my colleague from Saint-Maurice—Champlain. So that party has balanced its budget at the expense of the least disadvantaged.

This is a government that is going to invest heavily in the armed forces, that is going to govern in such a way as to generate huge surpluses which will be concealed so as to put them into the debt without debate. It will hide the \$3.4 billion surplus at CMHC while 1.7 million of our fellow citizens are experiencing housing problems.

So this is a government that governs blithely on the right, listening to its little friends, its little lobbies, and using its little strategies, and, in an election situation, flirts with its NDP friends, who are always falling for their tricks.

I think that the same thing happened in a minority government in 1974—I may be off a year or two—where they lost half of their members following this type of agreement with a bigger and more cunning fish—

An hon. member: And more voracious.

Mr. Christian Simard: Yes, more voracious. I thank my colleague. So they fell into the trap. I think that Quebeckers will not do the same with such an empty election promise. In June 2004, we heard such promises, for example the promise to put \$1.5 billion in social housing, another promise that was broken.

With a knife to its throat and afraid to lose power, the government leans a little to the left, then leans a little to the right, then does a little something underhanded, like buying a member's vote. When I

say buying, let us be clear. Following representations to the Prime Minister, there are promises of supplementary funding for Africa, when the government did not have the moral dignity to provide such funding when it should have done so. The government is trying to buy the vote of an independent member by promising aid to Sudan. Just that is enough to skew the process and, just for that, we should kick these people out of office as soon as possible.

• (1700)

[*English*]

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am certainly not in a position to continue the debate of the previous speaker. I am kind of shocked that a member would regard the situation in Darfur as just a political issue, a location where there is what we regard as abject lawlessness, where men, women and children are being killed.

Notwithstanding the efforts of the African Union and the United Nations, more has to be done there to protect what life there still is in Darfur. Thousands and thousands of people are huddled around in camps because they are at risk of death or being maimed or raped if they move.

I do not accept that the Darfur issue around here is purely an issue of party politics. I regret that the new member is falling into a pattern of regarding the debate around here as just politics. I am not sure Canadians will be tuning in much longer to hear the political rhetoric.

I would like to get back to the motion even though it has been radically altered to conform to the Conservatives' plan here. I will speak to the main motion through the amendment if I can, as difficult as that may be to do.

The original motion had to do with the committee report that looked through the financial circumstances surrounding the Office of the Privacy Commissioner. That was what I would call a three-headed monster at one point in time. It was a matter that I, as a member, worked on for awhile. It seemed to me at the time that the Office of the Privacy Commissioner had been spun off like a satellite. It was out of touch with the normal accounting processes that were in place around here. As it was spun off, as it carried on its work on behalf of Parliament for Canadians, there was an obvious reduction in transparency and very reluctant accountability.

I just want to make a note here that the Privacy Commissioner was and is an officer of Parliament, not a functionary of the government, not a civil servant nor a public servant in that sense, but someone who serves Parliament as an officer of Parliament. In that regard, it is Parliament that would normally carry the can on accountability. It is Parliament that authorizes the money for spending and it is Parliament that should be providing the management vehicle, in this case not the fault of the former privacy commissioner. In a sense, Parliament and, a bit more broadly, the government, did not have its act together.

A whole list of issues come to mind now as we look back 10 and 20 years. As the parliamentary component of governance has grown, we have not grown the management infrastructure there. Even today we are working on the funding mechanism for officers of Parliament and other issues.

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In this particular case, when problems became apparent it was up to Parliament to ferret out the facts and find out what was happening so we began our work. It was not easy to do. For that period, I sat on the government operations committee which was an all party committee. All members worked hard and eventually we succeeded in finding out enough information that allowed us to bring the matter back to the House, in the end as a contempt matter.

It was a difficult thing to do but at the time it was acknowledged that there were three other offices of Parliament that could bring some expertise to bear: the Office of the Auditor General, the Public Service Commission and the Treasury Board. Those three bodies responded at the time and responded very aggressively on behalf of Parliament, on behalf of the taxpayer, in an attempt to regularize what was happening in the Office of the Privacy Commissioner.

● (1705)

The same thing happens in the corporate world. When people do funny things with money they do not write a press release. They hide it. They bury it. It is actually quite difficult to find these things when they are going on. I say again that it happens in government, in business and probably in families but we need to have the mechanisms and the transparency that will allow us to find these things.

I want to acknowledge the work of the Auditor General, the Public Service Commission and the Treasury Board in responding to both the report from the government operations committee and the report of the public accounts committee. Both these parliamentary committees were active and busy in trying to essentially fix what was broken and clean up what was, in light of the size of government, a small problem but every dollar is worth a dollar. This was a small department.

In thinking back to the years 1993, 1894 and 1995 it was a time when under program review the government attempted to reduce the expenses of government. I was not working in that area at the time but the government decided to reduce the number of comptrollers. We are getting back into very boring territory but the comptrollers are the people who essentially oversee the spending directly. They do not actually write the cheques but they make sure everybody is following the right procedures when money is spent. The number of comptrollers was reduced. I fear that the reduction, with the objective of saving money, actually ended up costing us a lot of money.

However over the year it might be interesting to see just how much misspending, unfortunate spending, regrettable spending and improper spending there was over the period with the reduced number of comptrollers. The government has now decided that there will be more comptrollers. We are investing in a whole new mechanism of comptrollers. It will take a couple of years to get them all back in place but that I am sure will provide for better public spending.

A lot of us use the airport parkway. I can recall that in about 1991 I was sitting in opposition. I see a member opposite who was actually sitting in government then. As an opposition member I used the parkway to the airport. The National Capital Commission, which maintains that roadway, decided at the time to replace the shoulders right up to the pavement of the road with grass much as exists in the

Gatineau parkway. It is a lovely parkway road up in the Gatineau. The NCC wanted to do the same thing on the way to the airport on this side of the river.

The NCC loaded all the gravel on the shoulders for about four kilometres or five kilometres on both sides of the road and then brought in lovely new loam soil. It was put down at the side of the road. It looked like a garden getting ready to happen. It then brought in sod and put it down. It was looking pretty good for the first couple of days. It took them some weeks to do this. It was a big project. I do not know how much money was involved but it was a lot.

Son of a gun, drivers actually did not stay on the paved road. A lot of them pulled off to the side which put tire marks and ruts into all the lovely new grass and soil that was probably imported from some place in Manitoba. After a while it started to look like a grass parking lot after a rainstorm.

● (1710)

I felt bad about what had happened because I was looking forward to having a parkway as lovely as the one in the Gatineau. Son of a gun, if the NCC did not change its mind and along came the bulldozers. They pulled up all the sod and the soil and got a new kind of gravel from somewhere else and laid it down on both sides of the road for 4, 5, 6 or 7 kilometres. Someone made a bad decision, which is what that was all about. It was not necessarily a stupid decision or a corrupt decision. The NCC wanted to make the road look better. However it probably cost us \$10 million or \$20 million.

I was in opposition at the time so I poked around a little bit but in the end the money was spent. That is an example of how in government things can just go wrong and money gets misspent. In the private sector people might actually be fired. The private sector might actually tell its employees that the project was so dumb that it could not keep them around anymore and they had to get out.

In government, however, it is more of a collective decision. There is usually not one person involved. I can assure the House that the government did not write a press release when that roadway was finished a year or two later. I was so embarrassed I just wanted to forget about it.

That is not being partisan. It does not matter which party is in government because when the stuff goes bad it goes bad. It is not political dollars. It is taxpayers' dollars.

In any event, that takes us back to the current motion. As we all recall, the motion was to concur in the public accounts committee report on the subject of the financial management of the Office of the Privacy Commissioner. The motion has now been converted into a non-confidence motion that would bring a vote at some point in the House.

It seems like every avenue we try to go down we just end up coming back to the same old politics. It looks like it is going to be that way. All the opposition wants is a vote. The two opposition parties on that side of the House seem to think that they will win the vote. They do not know whether they are going to win the vote but they want to have a vote. They think that if they win the vote it will trigger an election, which it may do. However the government has to be defeated on a confidence motion that is a real confidence motion, not a fake confidence motion.

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The amendment to the motion that we are debating here says that we will take that committee report, which was a good committee report, and we will gut it. We will drop everything in it, send it back to the committee with magic words about non-confidence and we will get the committee to re-report that. In other words, we will send the report back with a little grenade, get the committee to report the grenade back to the House and then we will vote on this like a time bomb. That is pretty cynical procedure.

I actually have to allow the opposition the right and ability to do that because the job of the opposition is to test the government. I just regret that it seems to be almost 100% of the stuff we are doing around here now is this testing, because there are still some good things happening around here. The opposition will not agree with that but I am seeing it. If we read our newspapers carefully we will see it. The government is still accomplishing things and that is because the government is not what is in the House.

•(1715)

The government is made up of all those civil servants who are spending about \$150 billion, \$160 billion of taxpayers' money. They are out there doing the good work. The government and its ministries develop policy. All that is good stuff, unless we are talking about the NCC roadway that I mentioned earlier. Maybe the government is not 10 out of 10 all the time, but there is a lot of good stuff happening.

Canadians had a very good weekend as we opened the new war museum and paid tribute to our veterans. I felt very good about that. That was a non-partisan piece of governance and I thought it went very well for the country. No one here would argue with that, I am sure.

We have this very partisan, 10 out of 10 delivery of landmines here intended to, at least at this point, cause a vote. We will have a vote. I will be one of the 308 members. Just for the record, I know there are 308 MPs. One is the Speaker and one of our seats is vacant. We are waiting for a byelection in Labrador. I am hoping the new member will be from the party that I know best, the Liberal Party.

However, the voters in Labrador will know what is best and I will have to accept their judgment, whatever that is. There will be 306 of us who will have a chance to vote. I am hoping that the vote will not be on the motion we have cynically floated by the House today. I am hoping it will be on a matter of substance and a matter dealing with the budget.

There is a tonne, a list this long of things in the budget. Maybe not every Canadian agrees with everything in the budget, but there are a whole lot of good things in there, dealing with infrastructure for our cities, early learning, and reinvestment in our armed forces. The record here is replete with discussion on the budget.

Regrettably, we are not discussing the budget now, but that debate must be imminent. I am encouraging the government House leadership to get to a debate on the budget as soon as we can. When that debate is near the end, then we will have a vote. That vote will be a confidence vote not because we make it that but because a money bill, a budget vote, is a confidence vote.

In the meantime, I have some work to do. My colleagues on this side of the House have work to do and there are probably some members in opposition who have work to do. I am hoping they will

get a chance to do it with all the political rhetoric going on because it has not helped the House too much. The rhetoric is getting so sharp that some of us are getting awfully distracted. I admit I get a little distracted at times by the sharpness of the rhetoric. It is not necessary to be that sharp. We could probably do a little better.

I am hopeful that colleagues on both sides of the House will have a few more days, a few more weeks or, who knows, a few more months to make this Parliament work. That is what my constituents want me to do. I will continue to do that, but I know we will have a vote coming up. I am getting ready for that as are members opposite. On this side we are planning to win that vote.

•(1720)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Gagnon (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Madam Speaker, I was listening very closely to the speech that was just delivered to the House. I must say quite honestly that I had difficulty following it. At one point, it was a matter of building roads, transporting gravel and all sorts of other things, but I do not know exactly what the hon. member was trying to say. I do not know whether some of my colleagues managed to grasp the meaning of this speech.

Nevertheless, my colleague spoke of wasting time. A good example of this is the time he wasted delivering his speech, since he did not really know what he was talking about.

In the beginning he said there was no respect for aid to developing countries. I was a little insulted by that. What about the work the Liberal Party has done for developing countries? Over 50 years ago, Lester B. Pearson, who was a Liberal, won the Nobel Peace Prize. He gave the United Nations the idea that developed countries should give 0.75% of their GDP to developing countries. For that excellent idea, he received the Nobel Peace Prize. That was 50 years ago, but Canada still has not reached half the amount it should be giving to developing countries.

The hon. member said there is a lack of respect toward aid to developing countries. I would like him to talk about what his government has done in that respect.

[*English*]

Mr. Derek Lee: Madam Speaker, I was certainly being critical of one of the member's colleagues who seemed to be deprecating the current discussions on assisting the people in the Darfur region of Sudan and turning it into a political football.

The member also made some comments about Canada's heritage in peacekeeping and our work with the United Nations in international development. As I recall, Lester Pearson received the Nobel peace prize for his efforts in peacekeeping as opposed to international development. There was a serious problem in Gaza at the time, the Suez crisis, and Canada made a serious and positive contribution toward its resolution. Mr. Pearson won the peace prize for resolving that issue.

Routine Proceedings

Since then, Canada, like most of the developed countries, has been a contributor, sometimes more and sometimes less, to international development. The standard he referred to, .75% of our GDP, is an often sought after standard, but we are not there yet. I do not even know whether we are half-way there yet. We are committed to increasing our percentage of GDP. So we know what kind of dollars we are talking about, Canada's GDP has just gone over one trillion dollars. This is a moving number. It is a lot of money.

Canadians are committed to international aid. They want to do it responsibly. There is a large amount of money in the budget, including a significant investment in our armed forces. That money will not go toward international aid, but go toward international peacekeeping.

• (1725)

Hon. Keith Martin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I heard with interest the comments made by the member from the Bloc Québécois and my friend from the government.

I want to correct something because the member from the Bloc is quite mistaken. I want the public to understand that what we have recently done as a government on the issue of aid development is very innovative. What we are doing for the developing world is truly extraordinary and dynamic.

We are focusing the amount of aid on a fixed number of countries. That means the former 100-plus countries we focused on are going to be lowered in number. We are doubling the amount of aid that we are putting in. This is the important thing that the member across the way should understand. The Government of Canada is doubling the amount of foreign aid within the next three to four years. We are even doubling the amount of aid within that envelope for Africa. Within that is something very exciting which is going to meet seven out of eight of the millennium development goals through the Canada Corps.

What is the greatest challenge in developing countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa? It is the lack of capacitives, a lack of doctors, nurses, teachers, engineers to build roads, hydrologists, and agricultural experts. There is an absence of that. What is Canada doing? Through the Canada Corps, we are mobilizing a professional core of individuals who want to work overseas to increase these capacitives. That is truly exciting.

That means we will be able to increase the capacitives on the ground. We will teach people in foreign countries how to be doctors, how to be nurses, and how to provide health care. We are going to provide them with the technological capabilities and organizational abilities to have the infrastructures. We are going to give them the basic tax structures, work with them to develop an independent judiciary, develop the map for economic policies that will enable these countries to mobilize the extraordinary resources that they have within their own country's borders.

One of the greatest tragedies of sub-Saharan Africa is that it has 40% of the world's natural resources, but it is the only place in the world where the numbers of the poor are increasing. HIV-AIDS is eviscerating the economies of these countries killing more than two million people a year.

What is the Canada Corps going to do? My colleague from the government has articulated that we are going to put money that the Bloc should understand will go directly into increasing capacitance on the ground in these areas to break the poverty cycle. It will enable these countries, with good governance, to use these resources and pour these resources for the benefit of their people, which is truly exciting.

Canada will be at the forefront of that and at the G-8 summit in Scotland it will be one of the cornerstones of what we are going to be putting forward.

Is it not more important to ensure that taxpayers' money will be spent wisely rather than simply increasing the amount of money we have? Is it not more important that we ensure that taxpayers' money will be spent wisely and effectively first before we increase the amount of money up to the .7 that the member put forward?

We are trying to ensure that our resources are going to be spent wisely first, focused and effective, and that we have a gradual ramp up in increasing the amount of resources we have.

• (1730)

Mr. Derek Lee: Madam Speaker, that is a lovely leading question, but the answer is of course, yes. International aid is one of those areas where we can shovel a lot of money. Three-quarters of 1% of our GDP is \$7.5 billion because I just did the calculation. That is a great deal of money to be sending abroad where there is not necessarily transparency and accountability.

Therefore, before the money moves into development aid and helping people and countries build, there has to be groundwork, infrastructure and frameworks along with the expertise. My colleague has just pointed out the essential need for that to be there before we start to move the money.

The doubling of our resourcing is wonderful. We just cannot do it tomorrow. It will happen next year and the year after, and the year after. We will do it carefully. We rely heavily on non-governmental organizations. We call them NGOs and they are essential in our delivery if we are going to find new and better ways to do this, and better our efforts to get more bang from our bucks.

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to rise today and speak in this debate. As a lot of people have figured out, this is a rather strange motion that is presently before the House. I find it almost weird.

The opposition has dragged up a previous report of the public accounts committee. I should point out that I am now and have been for three or four years a member of the public accounts committee. This report has some age on it. It dealt with the Office of the Privacy Commissioner. The opposition wants to make an amendment to this report and send it back to the committee, I suppose. The Leader of the Opposition, in what I consider to be this very unhealthy and unnatural quest for power, has sought and received the alliance or the partnership of the Bloc Québécois.

Before I speak to the motion, I do want to point out that I do find this a very unhealthy alliance. It is not a Canadian alliance, this partnership that we see developing before our very eyes.

Routine Proceedings

We have all attended marriage ceremonies and we have all heard the priest or the minister ask whether or not there is any reason why two parties should not be joined. I have never heard anyone respond that they should not be joined.

But in this case, I am going to stand in the House and I will say to this House and to all Canadians that these two parties should not be joined. It is an unholy marriage. It is an unholy marriage and one that I find offensive to Canadian values, one that I am sure will offend each and every Canadian listening to this show here tonight.

I will deal with the motion itself. First of all, I want to point out that the Office of the Privacy Commissioner is one of five offices that report directly to Parliament. The most common one, and the one that members of this House and Canadians are most familiar with, is the Office of the Auditor General. The Office of the Privacy Commissioner is similar. It reports directly to Parliament.

To go back to the Office of the Auditor General, it has approximately 500 employees. The Auditor General operates with a budget that is now in excess of \$50 million. Again, though, that office does not report to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services or to the Minister of Industry. It reports to Parliament.

It is the same situation with the Office of the Privacy Commissioner. That office reports to Parliament. The incumbent Privacy Commissioner is an officer of Parliament. He or she, whatever the case may be, works for Parliament, not for the Government of Canada. No minister within the Government of Canada can tell either the Auditor General or the present Privacy Commissioner what he or she can do.

However, as Canadians would expect, those offices and the administration of those offices have to comply with certain rules and regulations, especially in dealing with financial matters. The two most prevalent are of course the Financial Administration Act and all Treasury Board guidelines. No one would expect anything less.

● (1735)

However, there was a previous Privacy Commissioner, about which there are some well known facts, and let me note here that the Privacy Commissioner's office is not a great big office like the Auditor General's, but it does fulfill a very important role for all Canadians. That office was not being managed in a manner that met Treasury Board guidelines or the terms and conditions of the Financial Administration Act, and it certainly did not meet the test of financial probity that Canadians would expect of an officer of Parliament.

On this matter, we are really talking about a motion of the public accounts committee, but I should report what a lot of people in the House are fully aware of. A lot of the heavy lifting, a lot of the real work, was actually done by another committee, the government operations and estimates committee. It was the committee that probed into the administration of this office, and again I will say that this office is not a department of government. It is an office of Parliament.

That committee found wrongdoing, but it did not find it easily. It was a very lengthy process that required a lot of work, time and

effort by all members of the committee. I sat through at least two of the meetings. It was a committee that really worked well.

I believe there were 16 members at the time, all of whom came together because the committee was being given false information by the Office of the Privacy Commissioner. It took a lot of investigative work to get to the right information and finally the committee did. The committee members then wrote a report, which very quickly, as we all know, led to the dismissal or resignation of the Privacy Commissioner.

I want to point out and highlight again that this office had nothing to do with the Government of Canada. The person was an officer of Parliament.

Before that, the issue had actually come to the public accounts committee. The committee probed into the whole issue and wrote a report. That is quite some time ago now. What actually happened was that the Privacy Commissioner was either dismissed or resigned before he was dismissed. A new Privacy Commissioner was appointed. The whole office was revamped or reorganized. I assume that the office is now being operated in a manner that meets all Treasury Board guidelines and all the terms and conditions of the Financial Administration Act, along with the certain condition of financial probity which all Canadians would expect to see.

Really, it is an issue of problems developing in that office. The office was investigated properly by an all party committee of the House, which did an excellent job. When one looks at the report and sifts through the evidence presented at the hearings, one sees that it all distills down to the fact that the real problem was not with the lower level employees or the administrators of this particular office, which, I will say again, was rather small compared to government standards. It basically arose from the then Privacy Commissioner himself. Once he was replaced, it very quickly became a well run office.

That committee did its work and the public accounts committee did its work. It filed a report. Again, this is something that is past us. There has now been quite a bit of time spent on it. I am quite perplexed and bewildered and confused as to why this issue is being debated, discussed and talked about in the House right now.

I assume that this is perhaps more of the games being played in the House. It is unfortunate. I thought that after the weekend break we would come back here on Monday, get back to business and accomplish some of the initiatives that Canadians want us to do.

● (1740)

I must tell everyone in this House and every Canadian watching this show that I feel it is unfortunate we are here debating this motion. I think Canadians out there are certainly shaking their heads now about this very unholy marriage, as I call it, between the opposition Conservatives and the Bloc Québécois, which has resulted in this motion.

As the previous speaker has alluded to, very correctly, this is just another game that we are seeing here in Ottawa now. It is unfortunate and it is distasteful, but again, we have a Leader of the Opposition who has this unhealthy and unnatural thirst for power and this is just one of the things we are seeing as a result. We are probably are going to see more tomorrow.

Routine Proceedings

It is probably fair to say that tomorrow there will be another motion put forward by the Leader of the Opposition. If he can get the support of the Bloc Québécois, which I assume is quite prepared to support him in his quest here today in this House and in front of all Canadians, if he can get the Bloc's support to come together in this alliance, I assume we are going to have another motion tomorrow, and we will have one on Wednesday and we will have one on Thursday, and we may or we may not have one on Friday.

If I may continue on this whole issue, this situation we are dealing with in the House, I returned to my riding last weekend and spoke to a lot of people there. If I may summarize, what they told me is that they do not see any need for an election right now. They find this alliance as unhealthy and as distasteful as I do.

Back in June of last year, they told me, they collectively, as Canadians, elected a minority government and they as Canadians expected the members of Parliament who were elected to come to Ottawa and work in their best interests. They told me that this is not what they are seeing at this point. On that, I do have to agree with them.

They also told me that they are pleased with the last budget tabled by the finance minister. I believe it is fair to say that it did meet the expectations and the objectives of Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

It has been supported by a vast majority of Canadians, including at one time, I should add, the leader of the official opposition. It did contain the initiatives, the programs and the policies Canadians told us they wanted to see fulfilled. In the last election, which was held in the latter part of May and the early part of June last year, that is what they told us. That is what they have told us since then. It is my belief that we did respond when that budget was tabled just recently here.

We have talked about some of the initiatives that were in that budget. They have been repeated in the House. It will be very unfortunate for Canadians if this budget dies on the order paper because of the games we are seeing in this House at this very point in time.

One of the initiatives that is very near and dear to the heart of the people in the province I come from is the \$5 billion fund under the new deal, as it is called, for cities, towns and municipalities. This is something that they have been waiting for. Cities, towns and municipalities have been lobbying for this. They have been talking about it for years. This initiative, announced in the last budget, was very welcome to all the administrations, to all the elected officials and, I should say, to all the residents who live in these cities, towns and communities right across Canada.

•(1745)

Another initiative, which a lot of people are concerned about right now, is the early childhood development funding announced by our Minister of Social Development. There were some funds put in by the Government of Canada under the early childhood development agreement which went a certain way in this regard. Again, Canadians were telling us, and I believe they were telling every member of this House, that the Government of Canada had to do more in this regard. This issue was so fundamental to the education

of our youth that it was incumbent upon the Government of Canada to do this.

I could go on and on. The budget is very comprehensive. It basically adds a lot of funding to the social programs that Canadians wanted the government to fulfill, and that has been done.

The motion is so ridiculous and weird that it is difficult to get up here and speak to the it. I think anyone who is watching this and reviewing these proceedings can see right through it. It is just a charade. It is a game. It is an abuse of the House and it hijacks what we are supposed to be doing.

I should be here talking about other issues that are important to Canadians. I could talk for hours about everything that is in the budget and about some of the programs that have been announced since the budget. However, I am getting short of time.

I was party to preparing the report. I thought it was a good report. We tabled it with the House, although I should point out that it was not our committee that did most of the work. It was the other committee that did an excellent job on this. This issue was dealt with by the House. I have to give credit to all the members of the committee who worked hard on the issue. It was a very difficult situation. The issue we are talking about right now was dealt with several years ago.

What we have right now is an abuse, a game. I believe the Canadian public watching these proceedings, this sideshow, can see right through what the Leader of the Opposition is attempting to do to the House, to this institution and to the people who live in Canada. I would urge all members to firmly vote against the motion.

I appreciate the time allowed to me to debate this very unpleasant motion that is being brought upon the Canadian people.

•(1750)

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Madam Speaker, there have been times in my observation of the member opposite who spoke in the last number of years when I have had small glimpses of hope for him and some respect. However, his speech today was such a disaster when we think about what he was saying. He was saying that this Parliament should not ever have confidence in the government. All we want is to ask is this. Is there confidence in the government? There certainly has been no confidence in the government by the Canadian people in the last little while, judging by the things I have heard, and Parliament is supposed to reflect that.

Parliamentary procedure has always provided that the government has to have the confidence of the House of Commons. Now it does not and it is running scared. The hon. member is trying to twist it to make people think it is the Leader of the Opposition who has messed things up around here.

Routine Proceedings

I invite him to stop to think about what led us to this place. It is the deal the Liberals have made with the NDP, which puts our economy at tremendous risk because of the unplanned, totally willy-nilly spending that they have embarked on of some \$5 billion or \$6 billion. It is a weekend deal, written on a napkin. There is no thought given to what ramifications that will have on our economy and to the well-being of our country. How can we support a government that goes down that track?

We are simply saying, let us ask the question whether Canadians and this Parliament have confidence in the government. The Liberals made the deal with the wrong people.

The Liberals got around 36% of the votes cast. That is around 20% of eligible voters who voted for the Liberals. Now they say that they will jam down their throats something that the majority of them clearly do not want. They have used a parliamentary procedure, taking away our supply day motions. What will they do? Anybody that is put into a corner will try to solve the problem. The Liberals have created the problem and now they are trying to cast the blame on someone else.

That is despicable and I invite the hon. member to get up and apologize for his ill-advised speech and say that the Liberals will do better from now on.

• (1755)

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Madam Speaker, my colleague spoke about confidence. I can tell the House that Canadians do not have confidence in the alliance that has been worked out between the Leader of the Opposition and the separatist party. They are disappointed and they are appalled at this alliance.

The learned member across talked about the economy. For Canadians, let us talk to Canadians the economy.

The government was elected in 1993. The annual debt of the country was \$43 billion under a Conservative government. Every year \$43 billion was being added to debt of the country. Unemployment was 11.5%. Interest rates were 11.8%.

What has happened over the last number of years by using the correct fiscal and monetary policies that the country wanted? What has happened to our debt? For the last eight years, the country has operated at a surplus and that is something of which I am very proud.

What has happened to our unemployment rate that used to be 12% under the Conservatives and Brian Mulroney, the previous leader of the learned member across? Yesterday it was announced that it was 6.8%. It is unbelievably low. It is a dramatic decrease.

When the Conservatives were in power and they left the country in a mess, the debt to GDP ratio was 71%. What is it now? It is at 40%.

Interest rates are a true reflection of the confidence that the business community has in the government of the country. I remember those interest rates when the Conservatives were in power. I practised law then. I wrote the mortgages at 24% and it was not pleasant.

A whole generation of Canadians believe that interest rates were always at 6%. I can tell those Canadians that is not the case. Interests

were at around 12%, higher than before that, and it was not a pleasant place to do business. It was not a pleasant place to work. It was not a pleasant place to raise a family.

The learned member across talked about the economy. He should look at the statistics, he should look at the facts and he should at the excellent job that has been done over the last number of years.

The last matter he was talking about was wanting to have a confidence motion. He will have that occasion. The budget vote will be coming up I assume over the next two, three or four weeks. If my learned friend considers the budget unpleasant, he will be disagreeing with every Canadian to whom I have spoken to over the last number of years. I will guarantee him tonight he will have friends in the Bloc Québécois because they are prepared to stand up in the House and vote against the budget.

Again, he will have the opportunity. If the member across and the Bloc Québécois want to vote against the budget, they will have their opportunity and Canadians will watch in disgust and shake their heads as they do it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Madam Speaker, I realize that we would like to act on this immediately, but I heard certain things across the floor that I am really taking exception to.

When they talk about an alliance or a marriage, they should not forget that, whether it is based on the civil or religious definition, there is a contract involved. The only contract in effect in this House was signed by the two parties opposite. Here, we will never vote against a motion blaming the government. Indeed, the government has never done anything, except when it had its back to the wall. It has never come into this House with anything to offer to Quebeckers.

This is why I want to repeat a question that I already asked: Why does this government always wait until it has its back to the wall to try to reach agreements? That is my question.

• (1800)

[*English*]

Mr. Shawn Murphy: Madam Speaker, in the preamble to the question the member talked about a marriage. I do not know if it is an alliance, a partnership, a deal, an agreement, or whether it is signed before a notary public in writing. I know what Canadians are telling me. They find this arrangement to be very distasteful and almost alarming. Perhaps I would call upon the member across the way to explain just what this arrangement is. Canadians are disturbed about it. The more he could enlighten me, the better.

Routine Proceedings

He talked about being backed up against a wall. I do not know how to answer that. We are talking about a motion dealing with a committee report that was tabled two years ago. Those members are trying to dig it up from the archives of this building, bring it back before the House, and frame it as a confidence motion. That is a very unusual twist of the parliamentary rules and guidelines that we see here every day. It is distasteful and it is wrong. Nobody is being backed up against a wall. We are attempting to do our best to make Parliament work. We are attempting to do what Canadians sent us here to do. I will say quite clearly right here tonight that we will continue to do that.

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Niagara Falls, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to add a few comments to the debate.

The member said that we on the opposition side are trying to frame the debate. This is a debate on confidence. How much clearer can we get? It calls on the government to resign. What part of that do they not understand? That is as clear as anything.

We had to bring this forward as part of a concurrence motion because the government has denied the opposition days to us that are our right. We are not getting them. That is very wrong. These rights are not some sort of a gift from the Liberal Party. They are built into our system which is hundreds of years old. We have a right to bring in these motions. That is exactly what we have done and it is going to be up to Parliament to decide. We are calling on the government to resign and we will have a vote on this, hopefully in the next 24 hours. Parliament can decide and Canadians can accept that.

I apologize to the member from P.E.I. I did not catch all of his comments. He said something about alliances and because he raised the matter I feel compelled to make some comments.

I am assuming that he is talking about the alliance that was struck between the Prime Minister and the Minister of Transport as one of the founders of the Bloc Québécois. I did not catch it all but I am assuming that is the one he talked about. The Prime Minister of Canada and one of the founding leaders of the Bloc Québécois made an arrangement. It seemed to me that he was throwing the question back to us on this side of the House.

All I can say is, ask the Prime Minister. I do not know what the deal is; I do not know the terms of the alliance, but it looks pretty cozy. They sit beside each other in the House of Commons and get the opportunity to chat, but what the details are of that alliance I am not in a position to say.

I suppose we could comment on the alliance between the New Democrats and the Liberals. I called it a marriage the last time I spoke on this. I guess the NDP budget details will be tabled tomorrow. We will all be very interested. When I heard this courtship was taking place and that a deal had been made, all I could think is that Canadian taxpayers had better hang on to their wallets. When the NDP and the Liberals agree on anything, we know there is going to be lots and lots of spending.

An hon. member: A billion dollars a day.

Mr. Rob Nicholson: That is right.

There will not be any suggestion of a tax cut. We could check that when we assemble all the details. Canadians do not have to worry

about getting any money back because it is all going to be spent. Why would it not have been fair to consider the fact that Canadians are overtaxed? This is why the government keeps stumbling over billions of dollars somewhere in the lobby. Every couple of days the Liberals find a new bucket full of money that they find a way to spend, when they could be spending on some of the things that I think would be very helpful. Obviously, there is Canada's armed forces. They are all back-end loaded. We always have to wait for that.

On some of the tax cuts that would give us a break, why would they not look at the federal excise tax in the wine and beer industries? I could appreciate that the wine industry is not everywhere in Canada, but it is important nonetheless. I bet a lot of hon. members have breweries in their ridings. Why would they not look at that excise tax, bring it into line with what the Americans have? Why they did not do it I have no idea. It would have been a great idea. How would it be so bad for the NDP? I am not suggesting that they reduce all taxes because I realize that is against their philosophy, but to reduce this one tax, do they not think it would make such a difference to both those industries? I am surprised that did not make the cut.

They talked about reducing airport rents. What about Pearson International Airport? How could they have talk about airport rents and then have forgotten one of the largest airports in the world? What a difference that would make to the travelling public in this country.

• (1805)

We are treated to the spectacle of a government that has been caught. They can deny all the want but the proof, among other things, that the Liberals have made up their minds about this evidence is that they have launched a lawsuit against a number of the companies and groups to try and get the money back. I think it is a fair assumption to make that they must be pretty convinced by the evidence because they have started a lawsuit to try and recover money from them.

It is too bad the Liberal Party could not be added as a co-defendant to get some of the money back from them. Why is it that the evidence that all these other groups have got the money is all right, but all the evidence that the Liberal Party got the money we cannot touch that one because it has not been proven yet? This is sworn testimony and guess what. All those people appearing before the Gomery commission are members of the Liberal Party. They are all officials of the Liberal Party. They are the people who ran the operation. They are the ones with whom other members of the Liberal Party are not agreeing.

This motion is a necessary one. I indicated to the House that the government through the House leader's office has reorganized the schedule and is not giving us the opposition days that are our due, that we have a right to expect. The opposition parties have been entitled to them for decades, for centuries. It is our right to bring this motion forward.

Routine Proceedings

This motion is being brought forward calling on the Government of Canada to resign. The government should resign before it promises this country into bankruptcy. It should resign so we can get to the bottom of the corruption that has become a hallmark of the Liberal government.

I do not think that Canadians will buy the suggestion that only Liberals can get to the bottom of a Liberal scandal, that only Liberals can recognize other Liberals who are crooks. I do not buy that.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Get an arsonist to put out the fire.

Mr. Rob Nicholson: That is right. Get an arsonist to put out the fire. That is not what we are all about here.

A new government of this country will get to the bottom of this. Justice Gomery can continue to do the good work that he is doing. I hope Canadians will give my party the opportunity to get to the bottom of this issue.

That being said, the business of this House is to decide whether we continue to have confidence in the government. I hope that very soon we will have the opportunity to pass judgment on the government. If there has ever been a government in history that so badly needs to have judgment placed upon it, it is the government we are facing across the aisle. There is no question about it.

I say to the government that our democratic rights are not some sort of gift from the Liberal Party. The Liberals do not have the right to decide that. It is the Parliament of Canada. This House of Commons has the right to bring forward the motions that will test the confidence in the government. That is most certainly what we are doing. Despite all the procedural arguments, this is what the motion is all about. I commend my colleague, the member for Prince George—Peace River, for bringing this motion before the House so that members of the House of Commons will have that opportunity.

Canadians have recognized that the government has just about run out of time. That is the decision we will be asking Canadians to make in the very near future.

● (1810)

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister (Canada—U.S.), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure if I can formulate one question in 60 seconds. I find it simply amazing to listen to members of the opposition and their unruly behaviour during what is supposed to be a serious debate. I think it proves that the opposition members have no interest whatsoever in actually working. They only wish to use procedural techniques in order to not allow the government to work.

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Mr. Speaker, we have done our best to make this Parliament work, but we never bought into any kind of a deal between the Liberals and the NDP. Nobody voted for that. The amount of corruption that is uncovered every single day before the Gomery commission in sworn testimony and one group of Liberals pointing the finger at another group of Liberals is a disgrace. The time has come for judgment to pass down on this group over there.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: Order. It being 6:12 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the motion now before the House.

[*English*]

The question is on the amendment. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And more than five members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

And the bells having rung:

● (1815)

The Deputy Speaker: The government whip has proposed that the vote be taken at 6:30 p.m. this evening. The chief opposition whip has asked that the vote be taken tomorrow at the end of government orders.

I will refer back to a similar situation that happened in 1995 when the Speaker at that time urged the two whips to sit down and negotiate, if they could, a time that was agreeable to both sides. Unfortunately, I have to do that because one proposal is for 6:30. I will ask the two whips to see if there is an amicable agreement they could come to in the next five minutes.

I will proceed with routine proceedings and the whips can inform me if they have been able to come to a decision that they both agree on before we finish with routine proceedings. They have five minutes.

Mr. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I believe the longstanding tradition of the House is that whatever deferral is the furthest away, in other words, the deferral from the official opposition whip for tomorrow at the end of government orders, not 12 minutes from now, takes precedence.

The Deputy Speaker: I have already suggested that the Chair will rule on this in five minutes. I have encouraged the whips to get together and then the Chair will rule. We have to settle this before 6:30 p.m. because that is the earliest possible vote. I urge the two whips to get together. If they can come to an agreement, we will return within the five minutes and rule at that time.

Hon. Karen Redman: Mr. Speaker, I respect your wisdom. I would only offer as a point of order that my understanding is that as whips, both the government whip and the opposition whip, if we come to the table at the same time, you are then obligated to take a further deferral.

Routine Proceedings

However, I would point out, Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, that I had completed my motion for deferral. You had accepted it before the opposition whip sought clarification and then came forward with another motion. I would contend that I had completed my deferral motion before the opposition whip had been alerted to it and decided that he, too, would come.

• (1820)

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Bloc Québécois House leader, on a point of order.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, similar situations have occurred on a number of occasions. You in fact referred to one on June 15, 1995, when the government whip sought deferral of a vote, at the latest, during the course of the day, while the opposition whip wanted it to be held at 5:30 p.m. the next day. The Speaker asked the two parties to reach an agreement, as you have done. However, as they did not, the Speaker ruled that the vote would be delayed until the following Monday, the latest day.

The same situation occurred in 1996. Having ruled on a similar case, the Speaker deferred the vote to the next day, the later of the two dates. There is a well established practice in this House, which is referred to in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, whereby in the event of a difference, when there are two requests for deferral, the request for the later day takes precedence, generally speaking.

This is the third situation, and I believe you should act as did your predecessors, who acted very wisely.

[*English*]

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. My request to defer this vote must stand because the Standing Orders regarding the deferral of votes are very clear. They state that during the ringing of a 30 minute bell, either the government whip or the chief opposition whip may ask the Speaker to defer the division, which must be no later than the ordinary hour of daily adjournment on the next day.

The fact that the government whip wants to defer the vote to a later time today demonstrates that the vote on this particular motion can be deferred. The real question is, which deferral takes precedence?

I would argue that the latter deferral takes precedence because the authority of the chief government whip and the chief opposition whip in determining when this vote takes place is equal. I would point out, Mr. Speaker, that I was the concluding speaker and so, presumably, I have the right to leave my chair at the conclusion of the debate.

In determining when this vote takes place, and I think you can, the right of the chief opposition whip and the government whip to defer is equal. The government and opposition members are given the maximum time to prepare for a vote. On that basis, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that you take the latter deferral, which would be until tomorrow.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Gauthier: Mr. Speaker, I would like to add an argument, which occurred to me as I was listening to my honourable

colleague. The parties had concluded an agreement today. The leaders of the four parties are absent. They went to pay tribute to the veterans and to take part in the celebrations for VE Day, 60 years ago.

It was agreed that no vote would be held here in this House, since the four party leaders were absent. We are keeping our word, as are the Conservatives. I am sure the NDP is doing so as well. If the Liberals do not want to keep their word, we will inform their Prime Minister that they broke the non-aggression pact in order to allow the—

[*English*]

Hon. Tony Valeri: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I find it somewhat hilarious to hear the Bloc member actually suggesting he respects rules.

In any event, the motion that is before the House is not a confidence vote in any event. I would suggest that what we were looking to do was to facilitate this going to committee because I believe that the committee will do its work. There was no agreement with respect to House business. The leader of the official opposition made that very clear before he left on this trip.

In any event, this is an instruction to the committee. I would like to see the committee get on with its work. If the official opposition wants to defer this vote until tomorrow, that is fine with us. We wanted to get it to committee, so that the committee could begin its work and ultimately deal with the motion.

• (1825)

The Deputy Speaker: I would like to thank the government whip and House leader, the hon. member for Roberval, and the whip and House leader for the official opposition. I think we have eaten up the five minutes to see if we could come to an agreement and apparently we have. We will have a vote tomorrow at the end of government orders.

* * *

PETITIONS

RURAL POST OFFICES

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to present a petition on behalf of the wonderful people from Semans, Saskatchewan, who are extremely concerned about the potential closure of rural post offices.

ADOPTION

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present this afternoon, both of them dealing with the same issue.

The petitioners from my riding of Prince George—Peace River and from Oshawa, Port Hope, Peterborough, Lindsay, Whitby and Ajax, all in the great province of Ontario, wish to draw to the attention of the House that adoptive parents make a significant social contribution to our society and often face significant adoption related costs, but out of pocket adoption expenses are not tax deductible as yet.

Therefore, they are calling upon Parliament to pass legislation to provide a deduction for expenses related to the adoption of a child.

Routine Proceedings

ASSISTED SUICIDE

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have several petitions to present. First, I have petitions signed by 186 residents of your province, Mr. Speaker, including I believe several of your constituents, praying that Parliament maintain the criminal prohibition on assisted suicide. They note their concern that the Minister of Justice has proposed a parliamentary debate on legalizing assisted suicide.

I also have a petition signed by some 53 residents of Abbotsford, British Columbia, calling on Parliament to maintain the prohibition on assisted suicide.

MARRIAGE

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have another petition signed by some 200 residents of various parts of Alberta, including Edmonton, calling upon Parliament to preserve the traditional definition of marriage as the union between one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

I have a further petition signed by over 200 residents of Alberta and Saskatchewan calling upon Parliament to use all possible legislative and administrative measures to preserve and protect the current definition of marriage.

RIGHTS OF THE UNBORN

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions. The first is from petitioners who pray that Parliament act immediately to extend protection to the unborn child by amending the Criminal Code to extend the same protection enjoyed by born human beings to unborn human beings.

MARRIAGE

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my second petition says that marriage is an institution so basic to the human condition and asks that Parliament take all necessary means to maintain and support the definition of marriage as the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Hon. Raymond Simard (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Minister responsible for Official Languages and Minister responsible for Democratic Reform, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Question No. 131 will be answered today.

[Text]

Question No. 131—**Mr. Gordon O'Connor:**

Regarding the status of CFB Bagotville, does the government have any plans or, if there is no plan, has there been or are there ongoing discussions or consideration being given: (a) to close the base; (b) to eliminate or reduce any of its capabilities and/or personnel strength; or (c) to change its role or function?

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): In response to (a) the government has no plans to close Bagotville.

In response to (b) there will be no reduction of operational capability or operational tempo at CFB Bagotville. This summer, as part of its ongoing efforts to maintain an effective wing organization

and transform to meet today's defence needs, the air force will be reorganizing the two residents CF-18 squadrons. As a result of this reorganization, two military positions will be transferred to the new Canadians Forces Air Warfare Centre in CFB Trenton and one civilian position will be reintegrated into the CFB Bagotville public service work force under the Treasury Board priority referral program. There will be no change in the number of aircraft at CFB Bagotville. Moreover, an additional 13 civilian contractor positions will be added in support of the construction of two new CF-18 simulators.

In response to (c) the role and function of CFB Bagotville will remain unchanged.

* * *

• (1830)

[English]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Hon. Raymond Simard (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Minister responsible for Official Languages and Minister responsible for Democratic Reform, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if Questions Nos. 118, 127 and Starred Question No. 126 could be made orders for return, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 118—**Mr. Pierre Paquette:**

With regard to the statements that the Minister of International Trade made in the House of Commons on March 9 and 11, 2005, concerning the \$350 million allocated to the softwood lumber industry: (a) who receives this money; (b) how much has already been spent; and (c) what is the breakdown per recipient?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 127—**Ms. Alexa McDonough:**

With respect to the transfer of funds from the government of Canada to the government of Nova Scotia for the post-secondary education institutions, what are the precise, actual / projected transfer amounts to the government of Nova Scotia for each of the fiscal years 2002-2003, 2003-2004, 2004-2005, 2005-2006, and 2006-2007 under each of: (a) the current funding formula in which funds are divided amongst the provinces based on their general population as a percentage of the general Canadian population (per capita); (b) a funding formula in which funds are divided amongst the provinces based on the number of students attending post-secondary education institutions in that province as a percentage of the number of students attending post-secondary education institutions in Canada (per student); and (c) a funding formula in which funds are divided amongst the provinces based on the number of full-time-equivalent students attending post-secondary education institutions in that province as a percentage of the number of full-time-equivalent students attending post-secondary education institutions in Canada (per student, full-time equivalent)?

(Return tabled)

*Question No. 126—**Mrs. Lynne Yelich:**

With respect to the Employment Insurance Program Compassionate Care Benefit: (a) how many people have applied for the benefit each month since it came into effect; (b) how many people were granted the benefit; and (c) how many people were declined the benefit and for what specific reasons?

(Return tabled)

Adjournment Proceedings

[English]

Hon. Raymond Simard: Mr. Speaker, I ask that all remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[English]

CORRECTIONAL SERVICE OF CANADA

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to return to a question I asked originally on February 25. At that time, I wanted to make sure that the House was aware of media reports in February which indicated that Stoney Mountain Penitentiary, which is located in my riding, was ranked third out of 54 federal prisons for weapons seizures.

Also, correctional officers confiscated nearly 1,200 weapons across Canada during 2004. They put their lives at risk every day, but the government will not provide them with stabproof vests.

As well, the government has continued to delay coming to an agreement with the officers union and they have now been without a contract for almost three years.

At that time I asked when the government was going to make a decision to go back to the table in good faith and start negotiating with the correctional officers. Unfortunately, nothing happened.

I did not receive much of a reply, so on March 31, I tabled Question No. 121 in the House, which was just answered last week. My question was:

With regard to the expiration of the collective bargaining agreement between the government and Correctional Service of Canada employees nearly three years ago; (a) what is the current state of negotiations?; (b) is the government currently engaged in negotiations?; (c) when does the government estimate that a contract with the Corrections officers will be signed?

Treasury Board responded that:

—on November 30...after several meetings, the conciliation officer appointed by the Public Service Staff Relations Board...informed the parties of his decision to terminate the conciliation process based on his assessment that the number and the scope of issues still remaining provided a limited perspective that the conciliation process would lead to a settlement.

This is completely unacceptable.

Correctional officers right across this country put their lives on the line with some very dangerous individuals in our Correctional Service penitentiaries.

I have been through the two federal institutions in my riding, Stoney Mountain Penitentiary and the Rockwood Institute. Let me tell members that while walking through there I was looking at a group of individuals who were there for a reason.

As well, a very aggressive recruiting campaign is happening with gangs and it is almost impossible to manage the situation in the penitentiary. During our break week I was out there again looking at the whole problem of gangs. There is a gang environment. These individuals cannot be allowed to mix. Up to six gangs are now participating in recruiting new inmates.

All sorts of terrible things are happening there and it is the guards who are putting their lives on the line to maintain the peace. People outside in the community are actively recruited and are throwing drugs over the fence using slingshots and potato guns and other things of that nature. Inmates have access to drugs while they are out in the yard because people out in the community are willing to take the risk of providing drugs to the criminal element inside the penitentiary.

Therefore, when is the government going to negotiate in good faith with the correctional service union so that, first, officers can be properly compensated for the risks they take in managing and caring for those inmates? Second, when is the government going to provide them with the proper equipment so they can protect themselves, so they can protect their lives?

I look forward to the response.

Hon. Keith Martin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the member's comments. I share his concerns.

I used to be a correctional officer myself. I worked in a maximum security institution when I was going to school and university. I know very well the challenges that are faced by a correctional officer on the line, particularly those in maximum security and medium security institutions where correctional officers are at times faced with some very difficult circumstances and very challenging inmates, to say the least.

Let me also say, though, that our government is committed to ensuring the safety of the officers and to giving them the ability and the powers to do the difficult jobs that they do. I also want to say that we are deeply grateful for the work correctional officers do to keep our streets safe.

On the issue of negotiations, let me say for the hon. member that negotiations on a new agreement began in March 2002. Since then, the employer has been working diligently to come up with an agreement that is satisfactory to both parties. Although the parties have been at the bargaining table for over 75 days to negotiate a new collective agreement, several major issues continue and still remain on the table.

Officials at the Treasury Board Secretariat and representatives from the bargaining union are in discussions at this moment to determine the most appropriate course of action to resolve these difficulties. Let me be very clear: the Treasury Board is committed to the collective bargaining process with the ultimate goal of reaching a negotiated settlement that is fair to the correctional officers and fair to the taxpayer.

During negotiations, CSC is guided by the Public Service Staff Relations Act and fully respects the correctional officers' rights and demands.

Adjournment Proceedings

CSC's mandate, as I said before, is to provide a safe working environment. We are trying to do a number of things, including trying to help ensure that our officers have the ability to detect contraband, which is a challenging task at the best of times. As a result, one of the issues the hon. member brought up was the issue of protective clothing.

I want to assure the member that protective clothing and equipment is available to correctional officers in the course of their duties. This includes that every federal institution has a supply of vests that are stab and bullet resistant, which are part of the security equipment they carry, including, I might add, that those in maximum and medium security institutions have the ability to have handcuffs, and most of them in fact do. They also have available to them chemical agents that are used to immobilize an inmate who is causing difficulties.

I have federal institutions in my riding too. I know that this has been a very difficult time for our correctional officers. I have spoken with the Treasury Board minister. He is seized with the desire to try to resolve this as quickly as possible within the confines of the rules that restrict him. I want to assure the hon. member that he is trying to work with his officials and CSC officials to try to resolve these difficult issues very quickly so they can get back to work with a contract.

• (1835)

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, I thank the parliamentary secretary for his answer and I appreciate the fact that the equipment is being made available to the correctional officers. We have many brave men and women who work in these facilities and put their lives at risk. We do not need to encumber them with indecision on whether or not they are going to have a good contract, fair compensation and the ability to do their jobs effectively with the proper equipment.

The parliamentary secretary said that the government is committed to ensuring the safety of the officers and to making sure that there are negotiations, but the fact of the matter is that it has been almost three years that these officers have been without a contract. It is time to step up to the table in good faith. In the response that I received in my enquiry of the ministry, it was stated that negotiations broke off on November 30, 2004. It is time to come back to the table in good faith, settle this, resolve it and use whatever means possible so that our correctional officers and their union know that they are being respected by the government.

Hon. Keith Martin: Mr. Speaker, as I said before, this has been a very difficult situation. I want to assure the hon. member that we are profoundly respectful of and thankful to the correctional officers for the work they do day in and day out.

We obviously do not want to have a situation where these honourable men and women are working in an environment without a contract. We certainly understand and respect the fact that they need to have some long term assurances that they will have a contract that is reasonable and meets their demands. We have an obligation, too, to make sure that the contract is going to be fair and reasonable to the taxpayer.

I fully believe that this situation can be resolved and resolved quickly. I know for a fact, because I have spoken to the minister

responsible, that both groups are coming to the table to work this out diligently. All I can say is that with interventions from my hon. colleague across the way and from others, I think we will be able to encourage both sides to come to a resolution that is going to be workable forthwith.

• (1840)

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, back on February 18, I asked a question of the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration around what Canada was doing to assist in the humanitarian project of resettling over 2,000 Vietnamese boat people who remain in the Philippines.

These refugees from the end of the Vietnam war, which was 16 or 17 years ago, have never been resettled to another country. They have no status in the Philippines and they have never been repatriated to Vietnam. A number of countries have taken some measures to resettle some of these folks. Australia, Norway and the United States have made plans to do that.

On February 18, the minister would not commit to participating in this humanitarian project.

There are 2,000 stateless Vietnamese boat people in the Philippines who have no legal rights. They are not allowed to work legally and their children are not allowed to go to school. They are in a very precarious situation there.

Organizations in Canada from the Vietnamese community, like SOSVietPhi and the Vietnamese Canadian Federation, raised this issue with the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration back in February. They also have been organizing in the community. They recently presented a petition with almost 27,000 signatures calling on the Canadian government to assist with this humanitarian project.

I think this shows an amazing adaptation to Canada by members of the Vietnamese community who know the generosity of spirit of Canada. They were beneficiaries of that back when the bulk of them were resettled at the end of the Vietnam war.

I need to acknowledge that the government has taken action since February 18, thanks to the pressure from the Vietnamese community and those of us who have raised the question here in the House and in committee, but more needs to be done.

The government has indicated it is willing to consider admitting up to 200 people who have family in Canada but there are actually around 500 who have relatives in Canada. The Vietnamese Canadian community is willing to do its part in terms of the resettlement but they would like to see a community sponsorship, not just family sponsorship. They would like that to be possible as part of this resettlement effort so the responsibilities can be shared more broadly.

We must also expedite the processing and arrival of these people and get them out of their precarious situation in the Philippines. We also need to expand the definition of the family to include adult married children, aunts, uncles and cousins. This is very important, especially for people who have gone through the dislocation of a major refugee movement and who have faced the death of many of their relatives as part of fleeing from Vietnam.

Adjournment Proceedings

I would like to ask the government when it is willing to undertake these extra measures to address this humanitarian crisis.

I want to conclude by saying that I am concerned about the government's attitude to the situation of these stateless people. The government said that they were integrated into the community in the Philippines. The former minister actually reported that our mission in the Philippines confirms that, "The Vietnamese community has been integrated into the local community both socially and economically".

Nothing could be further from reality. These people are stateless and they have no rights in the Philippines. They are not allowed to work. In fact, most of them make a living by being street vendors and are constantly harassed by the authorities because they do not have the legal right to even do that.

We need to move beyond this idea that somehow a stateless person can be integrated into the community to which they fled for some kind of safety. The government needs to address that issue as well.

Hon. Raymond Simard (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Minister responsible for Official Languages and Minister responsible for Democratic Reform, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for raising this important issue and for allowing me to highlight the government's strong commitment to family reunification.

As the hon. member has just indicated, Canada has agreed to accept those, among the 2,000 individuals in question, who can demonstrate they have close family ties in this country, which includes adult children, brothers, sisters, spouses, common law partners and dependent children. Parents and grandparents can already be sponsored as members of the family class, but now their applications will be expedited.

The hon. member will also know that Citizenship and Immigration Canada has worked very closely with SOSVietPhi to finalize a policy that will allow sponsored applicants to become permanent residents of Canada within the next 18 months. Potential sponsors have been asked to forward applications to sponsor their loved ones by December 31, 2005 at the latest.

Some cases may be more difficult than others to process and some applications may be completed faster, so the length of time it takes to get to Canada will vary from one case to the next. The hope is to finish processing all cases by the end of 2006.

The length of undertaking for adult children of a sponsor here in Canada has been set at three years. For everyone else, the length of undertaking is 10 years, which is the same for parents, grandparents and dependent children in some cases.

The Government of Canada believes that of the many newcomers it brings to Canada, families represent both an anchor and a source of strength for the future. They also represent the strongest possible foundation for the health and prosperity of any community or nation.

We therefore need to ensure that the family class remains a vibrant and integral component of Canada's immigration program. This is what we have done in the past and it is what we are doing now.

● (1845)

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Speaker, I think we need a further expansion of the family class. As I mentioned, the folks who have gone through the kind of refugee dislocation that the Vietnamese boat people went through, the people who faced the significant incident of death while they were fleeing from the Philippines, have seen their families and the sort of nuclear family arrangement completely altered, if they even have that kind of definition of family in their culture.

Therefore, we need to expand it even further to include aunts, uncles and cousins and ensure that those people can come to Canada.

Expediting the processing is good, but we are taking years to assist refugees often in getting them out of the precarious and vulnerable situations in which they find themselves. We find that not just with the Vietnamese boat people in the Philippines but with other refugees, the families of refugees who are here in Canada.

We need to move to ensure that the processing times for all those people are reduced significantly so they are removed from situations of vulnerability and danger, where their children's education is disrupted, where the health circumstances are not great and where their personal security is threatened.

We need to do more to expedite the processing of all those kinds of applications.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Mr. Speaker, I have heard it said that Canada should have acted faster to resolve this issue. I would like to point out, however, that neither the international community nor the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees considered the Vietnamese population in the Philippines to be in need of protection through resettlement.

Nevertheless, the Government of Canada recently agreed to help by creating a special family reunification policy under section 25 of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act for which approximately 56 Vietnamese and their family members will be eligible to apply. This represents around 200 people.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada has been working very closely with members of the Vietnamese community to identify eligible family members as well as to finalize certain elements of the policy. While the policy has been finalized, there is still a lot of work to do.

We need to determine who is eligible to come to Canada and then verify the relationship with their Canadian or permanent resident sponsor. We also need to verify and ensure that the applicant is admissible on criminality, security and medical grounds. Surely this approach is the most fair, balanced and practical way to proceed.

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is fitting that I rise today to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Holland and the role of Canadian veterans. The Canadian veterans still strike a chord of appreciation in the hearts of the Dutch people. On behalf of Canadian veterans and their families, in this debate it should be made absolutely certain that their sacrifices, immortalized in campaigns like the liberation of Holland, are not ignored by the government.

Adjournment Proceedings

As Canadians who have been following this issue know, originally I brought forward the case of the soldiers who had been injured in the line of duty while serving with Joint Task Force 2, JTF2, Canada's anti-terrorism unit. It is only through efforts such as this that benefits earned are paid to deserving recipients.

As a consequence of the attention that was directed to that issue, I was subsequently contacted by other individuals who, as veterans of the Canadian armed forces, participated in secret experiments or were involved in some other covert operations which should have qualified them for access to veterans' disability and pension benefits. It was with shock that I listened to the representative of the government deny the existence of these veterans who have been refused disability pensions. Even more incredible was when the government went on to say that no individuals had stepped forward with claims.

Canadians have heard this allegation before. For 60 years Canadian veterans from World War II who had been involved in the secret testing of chemical weapons were denied disability pensions for their injuries. The federal government tried to pretend these veterans did not exist.

It is important to quote from the report of former military ombudsman André Marin regarding the 60-year battle of Canadian veterans to receive recognition for injuries obtained as a consequence of being used as human guinea pigs during experiments involving chemical agents. He said:

Delay is no excuse.

There can be no confidence that those eligible applied when they were eligible. The threat of prosecution inhibited some from coming forward, for fear that even a pension application predicated on injuries suffered from experimentation would be an infringement of the Official Secrets Act, leading to years in prison.... It has been close to 60 years since these events, and putting a man on a pension now in the waning years of his life, while he was deprived of that pension for decades, is a paltry response.

Moreover, pensions have been denied to some because of the veil of secrecy shrouding these events. The dearth of dependable information continues to frustrate efforts to use the pension solution. Claims have literally been frustrated by the government's self-inflicted inability to validate those claims, an inability caused by the absence of any timely, official acknowledgement; the absence of lists of test subjects; and the failure, intentional or not, to document the medical files of the soldiers.

After reading the report of the ombudsman on the 60-year wait of World War II veterans to be recognized for their injuries, the Canadian public can understand why the minister of defence has moved to censor the work of the ombudsman as an independent advocate for military personnel. The new ombudsman preferred to resign than be subjected to that level of interference.

Rather than interfering with the work of the military ombudsman, the government should be moving to protect the independence of that office from political interference.

I have received from veterans copies of letters from Liberal ministers basically calling the veterans liars and denying they ever existed. Veterans have stepped forward and the government has refused to listen.

A Canadian veteran of the Korean war wrote to me to share his efforts for recognition and treatment of injuries sustained in the line of duty. In his case the veteran served as special forces with the

RCAF when the official position of the federal government is that there were no RCAF in Korea. While the government was denying his presence there, his original papers under theatre of war state "Korea", and he has the appropriate Korean and UN medals.

Thanks to the pensions versus secrecy conflict, the government maintains it cannot find this individual's appropriate medical records. The government then refers to the centre that was created in 1999, OSISS, as the panacea to all veterans' pension problems. The minister knows that there are statutory and regulatory limitations to what that centre can do. It is misleading to veterans and members of the Canadian public to suggest otherwise.

It is not unusual for the government to be in a state of denial even in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary. It is still in a state of denial over the forgotten victims of hepatitis C.

● (1850)

Hon. Keith Martin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have repeatedly said to the member that if there is a single veteran who has come to her attention who has not been taken care of, she should pass that information across to me or to the Minister of Defence and we will deal with it. Otherwise, the individual can call the office for disabled veterans, which we started a few years ago, and it will deal with their issues.

How many people have come forward? How many individuals has that member presented to me or the minister? Exactly zero.

We have to deal with the truth. Let me talk about the truth and the facts about the group she has mentioned.

Back in the 1940s to the 1970s, chemical testing was done on the personnel of the Canadian Forces with their consent, and that is important to know. They knew exactly what they were getting into and they did it with their consent.

In order to compensate those individuals, in 2004 we set up a program worth \$50 million and each individual received \$25,000 as an ex gratia payment for the work that they had done.

Of all the claims we have had, we have cleared out 700 of them and those individuals have received that payment. In addition that does not affect the pensions to which they are entitled. This is over and beyond them. It is an ex gratia payment for the work and for the sacrifice they made during that testing between the 1940s and the 1970s.

As I have said to the hon. member across the way, and I have said it to the public, if there are any other people who engaged in the chemical weapons testing and if they have not been dealt with properly or not been dealt with at all, they should let me, as the parliamentary secretary, or the minister know, and the member across the way can do the same. We will deal with their issues. There is no way we want to see these people not dealt with in a fair and honourable fashion. They have given so much to our country. It is our debt that we owe to them.

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In response to that, the Minister of Veterans Affairs introduced two weeks ago the biggest change in veterans' benefits packages in the last 40 years. It deals with health care, extended benefits, occupation, employment, help for the disabled if they are employed, help to our veterans, if they are not disabled, for employment and preferential hiring practices in the public service for those veterans.

The average veteran leaving after extended service is 36. That is very young. We want to ensure that those individuals have the tools, the training and the ability to become employed in the future.

That Veterans affairs benefits package, and much of that came from the veterans in my riding of Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, has gone into produce this national package that. A senator who was recently nominated and who was a general said that this package should go through forthwith.

I would urge the hon. member to encourage her colleagues to pass this legislation as quickly as possible for our veterans.

• (1855)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary still does not get it. We are talking about recent soldiers who have been subjected to experimentation. They are so afraid of being subjected to the Official Secrets Act.

The Minister of Health makes outrageous accusations about health care, but when it comes to Ontario Liberal friends who insist on making soldiers and the RCMP pay for medical services they are prohibited to pay or use by the Canada Health Act, the same self-serving minister is silent.

The fact that the Prime Minister's personal doctor operates private clinics means nothing to that government.

Even more unfortunate is when a member of the other place is used to attack the official opposition over the issue of veterans' benefits when it is clear that his political inexperience has been used to allow him to be an unwitting political pawn in the political games that a Prime Minister who dithers on veterans' benefits is only too prepared to play.

In this Year of the Veteran and the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Holland, we owe it to all veterans to provide the very best in medical care our nation has to offer.

Hon. Keith Martin: Mr. Speaker, we agree on one thing, and that is we owe our veterans the best that we have to offer. That is why I will lay down a challenge to the member who posed the question.

I lay down to her and her party that they pass the Veterans Affairs benefits package that not even her own party could criticize. The benefits package deals with the issues about which she is talking. We have put out the solutions for health care, for extended benefits, for the things our veterans should be receiving. Those are in that package. I beseech the hon. member across the way to pass the legislation for our veterans this week. We owe it to them. They have given so much to our country. Pass that legislation. It is good for Canada. It is good for the veterans.

The Deputy Speaker: The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24 (1).

(The House adjourned at 6:58 p.m.)

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