



CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 140 • NUMBER 101 • 1st SESSION • 38th PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, May 18, 2005
Part A

—
Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, May 18, 2005

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

• (1400)

[*English*]

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

[*Members sang the national anthem*]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[*English*]

CANADA DAY POSTER CHALLENGE

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, each year the Department of Canadian Heritage invites Canadian students from across the country to submit their artwork to the Canada Day poster challenge. Students were challenged to come up with a design and a statement that celebrated their pride as Canadians within the theme “Canada from east to west”.

I would like to congratulate Anthony Yu, a 13-year-old student from Queen Charlotte Intermediate High School in Charlottetown for being the Prince Edward Island winner. Anthony's winning design captures the spirit of Canadian identity from east to west to north. He will be joining the contest winners from across the country in Ottawa to celebrate Canada Day.

I would also like to congratulate Moonkyoung Cho, Carley McQuaid and Nicole Arseneault for being the other top finalists from Prince Edward Island. These students, and their peers across Canada who participated in the poster challenge, show us all the true meaning of Canadian pride.

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GANANOQUE REMEMBERS

Mr. Gord Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this year marks the 60th anniversary of the end of the second world war and around the world people are remembering. It is also the Year of the Veteran here in Canada.

I rise today to recognize two people who worked diligently over many months to publish a book that remembers residents of the small town where I live who gave their lives in service to their country. Earlier this spring, at the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 92 in Gananoque, Bill Beswetherick and Geraldine Chase unveiled their new book *Gananoque Remembers*.

Thanks to their efforts, we shall never forget.

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CRAIG MANUFACTURING

Mr. Andy Savoy (Tobique—Mactaquac, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Saturday May 7 one of Hartland, New Brunswick's oldest businesses and largest employers burned to the ground. Craig Manufacturing, a plant which builds industrial attachments for heavy equipment, employs approximately 90 people in my riding.

Having that many people out of work could have had a considerable economic impact on the entire riding, but instead, John Craig, Betty Lou and their team began immediate plans to resume business. A temporary office was set up less than 48 hours after the fire to continue serving customers, employing office staff and organizing the rebuilding.

I commend everyone at Craig Manufacturing for staying positive and looking to the future in spite of this disaster. But even more so, I commend the bravery and selflessness of the volunteer firefighters in Carleton County. They worked together and risked their lives to prevent what could have been an enormous tragedy. Several blocks of downtown Hartland were at risk of being blown up by giant propane, argon and oxygen tanks. Thanks to the skill and courage of the volunteer firefighters, such a catastrophe was fortunately avoided.

I thank the volunteer firefighters for their indispensable service and I wish everyone at Craig Manufacturing the best of luck.

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• (1405)

[*Translation*]

TEMBEC MILL

Mr. Guy Côté (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, for years, the Bloc Québécois has been calling upon the government to come up with an effective plan to assist the forestry products industry in Quebec.

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Some 403 workers have been hard hit by this government's inaction and incompetence. Tembec has announced it is closing three sawmills in Quebec. When the Tembec mill in Saint-Raymond ceases operations on May 28, 165 of my constituents will lose their jobs.

However, both Tembec and the workers tried to keep the mill profitable and operational by proudly manufacturing a high added value product. These many families earn their livelihood doing this work.

The government's failure in international trade and the forestry industry undermines the ability of our companies to compete. To add insult to injury, the Liberal government is accumulating astronomical surpluses in the EI fund, dipping into it freely and steadfastly refusing to correct this program's inequities.

This says a great deal about the Liberal government, which is more concerned with staying in power artificially than with giving any thought to the financial insecurity of workers who lose their jobs.

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[English]

WOMEN VETERANS

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise in the House today to honour Canada's women veterans during this Year of the Veteran.

Women played a major role in our nation's military history. Nurses were the first women to be welcomed into the Canadian military. During the first world war, more than 3,100 nursing sisters served in the medical corps.

[Translation]

Women played a greater role during the second world war. Approximately 50,000 women served our country, as members of the armed forces or the ladies' auxiliary and on the home front.

[English]

This afternoon at 4 p.m., the Minister of Veterans Affairs will be hosting a celebration of Canada's women veterans at the National Arts Centre. I invite all my colleagues of the House to join us in saluting our women veterans and honouring their achievements.

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DENTAL TECHNOLOGY

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to pay tribute to the Association of Dental Technologists. I am pleased to welcome here today the president of the association, Stephen DeLuca, and Al McOrmond of Oshawa.

The Association of Dental Technologists is an often overlooked but critical association in Canada. It advances the dental profession through education and communication, and is instrumental in pursuing excellence in dental technology services.

Canada is a world leader in dental technology, in large part due to the work of this association. Its members continuously work to improve the standards of their profession nationwide, ensure the

health of the public, and continue to advance their professional knowledge. It is instrumental in setting and maintaining the high standard of laboratory skills increasingly demanded of dental technicians in Canada.

The ADT is working to keep Canada at the forefront of the profession. I am honoured to have these members here today.

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NIAGARA FOLK ARTS FESTIVAL

Hon. Walt Lastewka (St. Catharines, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I take pride in rising in the House of Commons today to acknowledge and congratulate Mr. Stephen Ruf, the founding father of the Niagara Folk Arts Festival.

The festival is the oldest cultural festival in the province of Ontario and opened its 36th annual edition on Saturday, May 14.

Stephen Ruf's early years certainly shaped the man that he is today. During the second world war he lived in the Freiburg orphanage and saw first-hand the ugliness of racial and cultural discrimination. After immigrating to Canada and settling in the Niagara region, he sought a way to foster and showcase multiculturalism and the Folk Arts Festival was born in May 1969 and is still going strong today.

During the next two weeks, visitors can attend many open houses, allowing them to get an in-depth appreciation of the customs and traditions of the various ethnic groups in the Niagara region.

Stephen Ruf's vision of multiculturalism is to be commended. On behalf of the people of St. Catharines and the people of Canada, I thank him for his 36 years of dedication to this wonderful event.

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[Translation]

CANADIAN FEDERATION OF INDEPENDENT BUSINESS

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business is celebrating its 35th anniversary this year. The federation's mission is to act as an advocate for small and medium size businesses. It represents and defends the interests of over 24,000 small and medium size businesses in Quebec.

The federation's policy direction is based on the opinions of its members, which are gathered through regular polls conducted according to the one member, one vote principle.

The growth of the federation and of small and medium size businesses has been remarkable. In addition to being instrumental in job creation and economic growth, small business makes an enormous contribution to the development of communities throughout Quebec.

The Bloc Québécois is proud to draw attention to the 35th anniversary of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business; we wish it every success.

• (1410)

[English]

ETOBICOKE—LAKESHORE

Hon. Jean Augustine (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to represent the people of Etobicoke—Lakeshore. They have an incredible sense of civic pride and every one of them contribute to making our community the great place that it is.

This weekend we planted flowers in Farrah's Garden. Farrah is a young girl whose life ended tragically at the hands of her father.

We watched the moving of the original Mimico train station, which represents a great part of our local heritage.

We participated in a local waterfront cleanup. So many people rallied together to pitch in and clean up our neighbourhood.

I joined with community members at the sixth annual Lori's Room Walkathon in the name of Lorna-Lynn Martin, a young girl who battled with and succumbed to cancer.

The numerous local activities show the great spirit in Etobicoke—Lakeshore. Let us continue to make not only Etobicoke—Lakeshore a better place, but our entire country and the world a great place to live.

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CUSTOMS OFFICERS

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at 7 p.m. Sunday May 1, only 100 yards from the Canadian port of Roosville, a man was murdered.

A U.S. sheriff, who just happened to be at the Canadian crossing, took charge of the crime scene. The RCMP were called but they did not arrive until 8:15 p.m. They checked all around both the Canadian and U.S. ports with a dog while a single Canadian inspector manned the port.

In response to the murder, management wanted to double staff that evening but no one would come to work. Why would they when a man had been fatally shot in the head? Canadian customs officers are denied access to weapons for their self-defence.

The inspector on shift had to work alone until 7 a.m. the following morning.

At this same port of entry just months ago, Adam Angel, customs inspector, while also working alone, also died.

When is the minister responsible for emergency preparedness finally going to respond to the dangers faced by customs inspectors at ports of entry where employees have to work alone, isolated and in danger?

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OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Hon. Raymond Simard (Saint Boniface, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, there was an incident in the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates that demonstrates just how

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hollow the Conservative Party's so-called commitment to official languages is.

Yesterday, a member of the Conservative Party was questioning a witness in English. The witness chose to respond in French. The Conservative member then asked him, "I understood you're fluently bilingual, sir, is there any reason that you're responding in French at this time?" The Conservative member then asked, "Is there any reason you're responding in French to my questions?"

[Translation]

At their recent congress, the Conservatives voted against a resolution in support of the advancement of francophone and anglophone minorities in Canada. They kept repeating that, at least, they support bilingualism in the Parliament of Canada and other federal institutions, this some 40 years after the bilingualism policy was implemented.

Even that commitment is not so sure anymore. This goes to show once again that old Reform-Alliance attitudes die hard.

* * *

[English]

B.C. NEW DEMOCRATS

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, B.C. New Democrats, led by Carole James, stole the show last night with a fabulous win. With enormous credibility and a progressive platform, she took on the B.C. Liberals' mean policies and won the confidence of B.C. voters.

There will be a huge change in our B.C. legislature as 33 strong New Democrats advocate for progressive values, a sustainable environment and fairness and justice. It is time to end the reckless cuts and decimation of social programs that have hurt women, workers, poor people and aboriginal people.

The strong message from B.C. voters on democratic reform must also be heard. As federal New Democrats, we will redouble our efforts and continue to push the federal government to implement democratic electoral reform in Canada.

On behalf of our leader and all our members, I want to thank Carole, Joy McPhail and Jenny Kwan, who, for four lonely years, battled it out and stood up for all of us.

I congratulate Carole James and her new team for a great win. She led the way and the five B.C. NDP members of Parliament are ready to do the same.

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MEMBER FOR NEWMARKET—AURORA

Ms. Helena Guergis (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can see many unhappy Liberal faces today as they realize they have fallen prey to the ultimate example of privileged queue jumping.

I am sure many Liberals feel stabbed in the back by their leader after he let the member for Newmarket—Aurora slide straight into cabinet without doing the hard work so many of her new colleagues have done over the years.

Oral Questions

Does the Prime Minister really understand what he is getting?

During her leadership campaign, the member advocated term limits for prime ministers. Is she hoping the Prime Minister will accept her idea and resign?

In March 2004, the member for Newmarket—Aurora said, “We have gathered here from all different regions across the country and from all different backgrounds but we have one common goal, and that is to get rid of the tired old Liberal government”.

The member for Newmarket—Aurora has referred to herself as the Prime Minister in a cocktail dress but one who could bake a better economic pie.

I wonder if her new colleagues realize how much of that pie the Prime Minister is taking from them and giving to their new friend.

* * *

•(1415)

[Translation]

SPEECH AND HEARING AWARENESS MONTH

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am deeply committed to the cause of advocating for the deaf and hard of hearing, who account for more than 10% of the population.

The CRIM, a computer science research centre in Montreal, has made a significant breakthrough; it has developed a captioning system using voice recognition technology.

Despite such advances, much remains to be done, particularly with respect to French captioning, which is miserably lagging behind.

It is not right that, in 2005, francophones who are deaf or hard of hearing do not have access to programming in their own language. It is the federal government's responsibility to take action by requiring all broadcasters to fully caption their television programs.

Since the heritage minister and her government have failed to act, I will be introducing a bill today to amend the Broadcasting Act to make captioning mandatory.

As this is speech and hearing awareness month, I urge every parliamentarian to take concrete action to ensure that silence is no longer a barrier to the development of people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

* * *

[English]

NAPPAN EXPERIMENTAL FARM

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on May 29 the Cumberland County Federation of Agriculture will hold a rally at the Nappan Experimental Farm. The farm has been serving the farming community since before Confederation but now the Department of Agriculture has announced it will close.

The Nappan Experimental Farm enjoys soils and terrains that are unique to the maritime provinces and are not available at any other

experimental facility in Canada. The farm also has a close association with the maritime beef testing station that does necessary research on cattle. The beef testing station needs the farm to survive.

At a time when farmers are hurting, mostly for reasons beyond their control, research should be expanding, not contracting.

I have asked the minister to come to this event, have a tour of the Nappan Experimental Farm and the beef testing station, and meet with farmers who are affected.

Under no circumstances should the farm close if the minister has not even visited the facility.

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THE BUDGET

Mr. Bill Matthews (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a few weeks ago, when members of the Liberal Party stood up and voted for the budget, members of the Conservative Party sat in their seats and abstained.

Now, in a sudden turnaround, the Conservative Party wants to vote for one part of the budget implementation bill and vote against another part.

Surely the Conservative members from Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia know that voting for one part of the budget and defeating the other will result in defeat of the government and the entire budget.

The Atlantic accords will be lost with it. If this happens, I hope the Conservative members across the way do not have the gall to go back to their ridings and say that they voted for the Atlantic accord.

Premier Williams said earlier this week, “A vote for the budget is a vote for Newfoundland and Labrador”. That is the entire budget and not selective parts of it.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Niagara Falls, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been reports that the Liberal government is now considering a plan whereby donations that it receives from ad agencies up to their neck in the sponsorship scandal will now be put into a separate trust fund.

Maybe miracles never cease. The Liberals have been resisting this idea for several weeks but a deathbed conversion is better than nothing.

Could the government today commit to putting all the money it has received from ad companies into a separate trust fund?

Oral Questions

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again the party has been clear from the beginning that if in fact funds were received inappropriately those funds will be returned to the Canadian taxpayer. In fact, it is impossible to complete that transaction to the Canadian taxpayer until we have all the facts, until all the analysis has been conducted and until we have Justice Gomery's report.

If the party establishes an interim action in terms of a goodwill approach, that will establish goodwill, but that will not return the money to the Canadian taxpayer any sooner than the report from Justice Gomery.

• (1420)

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Niagara Falls, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is a bunch of nonsense. All they have to do is just check their records.

Last month the Liberals lost a motion that mandated them to put that money into a separate trust account.

Three elections have been fought on that dirty money. Surely Canadians have a right to know that this next election will not be fought with this dirty money.

Will they do the right thing now and put that money into a trust account?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, the party leader this afternoon will be making an announcement and that announcement will establish and affirm a goodwill through that.

Beyond that, the actual transaction, in terms of the transfer to the taxpayer, cannot occur until we have all the facts and we have Justice Gomery's report.

In Stevie Cameron's book, *On the Take*, there are allegations that the Conservative Party operated a tollgating operation in the province of Quebec. Perhaps it ought to establish some sort of trust fund as well or perhaps those members over there ought to take some responsibility for their actions.

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Niagara Falls, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is one bit of good news. Apparently Elections Canada is in the process of sending out party subsidies to all the parties and the Liberal Party is supposed to get a little over \$2 million.

I can appreciate, if all the stories about the Liberals' financial troubles are true, that they did not have the money before, but now that they have the cheque, why not do the right thing and let Canadians put their trust back into the electoral system, and put that money into a trust account?

The Speaker: I think perhaps if the member had phrased his question as to whether the money was being returned to the government, it might be in order, but it seems to me that asking a party to do something with money it is receiving for election returns is another matter and we will leave it at that.

The hon. member for Edmonton—Strathcona.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this Liberal government lost a vote which obliged it to create a trust fund for the dirty sponsorship money. So far, it has not done so.

Elections Canada is now preparing to pay \$2 million back to the government.

Can the Prime Minister tell us whether he is going to put that dirty money into a trust account, or fund a fourth election campaign with it?

The Speaker: I have the same reservations on this question as on the previous one. The question must be asked in other terms. Calls have often been made in this House for the Liberal Party to reimburse the government. I trust that the hon. member will be able to use acceptable language for his second question.

[*English*]

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: Mr. Speaker, while I did ask if they would return it as a government, the Liberals have rigged every rule in the book to benefit themselves. They have laundered thousands if not millions for ad scam. They rewrote election financing laws to get millions of dollars in taxpayer subsidies.

The only way Canadians can be sure the Liberals are not campaigning with dirty money is to put the Elections Canada subsidy in trust. Maybe it is their intention to buy another election campaign using that dirty money.

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, the Prime Minister has always been clear on this and the party has been clear on this, that if funds were received inappropriately they will be returned to the Canadian taxpayer and we will do that when Canadians have all of the facts.

Any interim step to establish goodwill is a step in that direction but it does not achieve that transaction until we actually have all of the facts from Justice Gomery's own audit process. He is working with party auditors to achieve that.

We are cooperating fully because we want to ensure that justice is done on behalf of the taxpayer and on behalf of all Canadians.

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[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the new Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development says she is a woman of principle. On April 13, she voted in favour of the establishment of an independent EI fund, a measure proposed by the Bloc Québécois to prevent the government from continuing to divert money from the fund at the expense of the unemployed.

Will the government honour the principles of its new minister by creating an independent EI fund right now, so that money for the unemployed can be set aside?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government has made considerable changes in EI, including changes in the independence of the commission. I believe a report was tabled yesterday in the House dealing with these matters.

Oral Questions

● (1425)

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, that is the very question. Yesterday the government rejected all the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, recommendations Liberal MPs had voted for.

I put my question again. The new minister, this woman of principle, voted in this House in support of the establishment of an independent employment insurance fund to ensure that the government would not divert funds, as it had in the past to the tune of \$47 billion. I am now asking whether the government will honour the principles of the new minister by creating an independent fund, yes or no. The question is simple, as is the answer.

[English]

Hon. Peter Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, steps have been taken to make the fund more independent. Also, in the last budget an additional \$300 million was applied in the general EI area. We now calculate the benefits on the best 14 weeks. It is much easier for workers on benefits to work without losing their benefits. We have extended the benefits in high EI areas where unemployment is over 10%.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, \$300 million is peanuts compared with \$47 billion in damages.

Three months ago, the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities made 28 recommendations aimed at substantially improving the employment insurance program. According to advocacy groups for the unemployed, the current budget contains nothing of note for the unemployed. The government has turned its back on the committee's report.

Now that the Prime Minister has treated himself to a new Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, could he assure us he will give her free rein to correct the situation?

[English]

Hon. Peter Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister is very grateful to the subcommittee for its recommendations. It is very grateful to the Prime Minister's task force of Liberals who made similar recommendations.

As I mentioned, the department has tabled a report on this matter. That report is now available to all members of the House.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in the negotiations with the NDP, the Prime Minister once again wanted nothing to do with improving employment insurance.

Can the Prime Minister tell us whether his human resources recruit negotiated only her own conditions of employment or whether she used the opportunity to negotiate the needs of the unemployed which she says she agrees with?

[English]

Hon. Peter Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am here and pleased to answer questions on employment insurance, which is of great concern to the government. Matters such as this should be left to other forums.

I will repeat, EI has been improved by the government. The government, in the report that was tabled as recently as yesterday, makes even further improvements. We can be proud of what we have done and we continue to improve EI for the benefit of all Canadians.

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MAHER ARAR INQUIRY

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans because we have no Minister of Justice when it comes to the case of Maher Arar. The hon. member for Halifax is testifying at the Maher Arar inquiry today and we share her concerns.

Could the minister please explain how justice is served when the people who are demanding an open and public inquiry here are referred to the Deputy Prime Minister who oversees the very organizations that trampled on the rights of Maher Arar?

Hon. Geoff Regan (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is committed to a full and public inquiry while balancing the need for national security or international relations and the safety and security of police investigations.

This is a very important inquiry. I will not comment on the actual testimony before the commission, but it is important to let it do its work.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, pardon me but this is a little difficult for people to follow now. The Deputy Prime Minister is responsible for CSIS and the RCMP. The justice minister is responsible for protecting people's rights from being trampled upon, but he is standing aside in the Arar case. He is passing the responsibility over to the fisheries minister who then abdicates all responsibility and passes it right back to the Deputy Prime Minister, who, by the way, wrote the law that tramples on rights and civil liberties and who oversees the security organizations involved.

What kind of government has no justice minister for Maher Arar?

Oral Questions

●(1430)

Hon. Geoff Regan (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows full well what has happened and why it is my responsibility to answer questions in relation to this matter. He also knows that we have a responsibility to balance the important interests in this matter, the interest in openness, the interest in a full and complete inquiry and the interests of protecting Canada in terms of national security or international relations and the security and safety of police work.

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SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government continues to suggest that things must wait for the Gomery report before people can make up their minds about ad scam wrongdoing. Clause k of Gomery's mandate prevents him from telling who is responsible.

Yesterday government bureaucrats admitted they were not waiting for Judge Gomery's report to implement reforms to the system. Why should Canadians have to wait to make a political judgment on the government?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the circular logic over there is almost laughable. I know I am not allowed to say that was a stupid question because you chastized me once. That was an obtuse question.

The fact is that if we were not taking action, Canadians would have every right to be angry at us. We are doing the right thing by taking action and changing our processes to ensure better value for Canadian taxpayers, more open and competitive processes and accountable and transparent ones.

She is out to lunch if she actually thinks she makes any sense with a question like that.

The Speaker: I encourage hon. members to be judicious in their choice of language. The hon. member for Calgary—Nose Hill.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians would like to make some changes too in the government over there and they need the opportunity to do that.

The Prime Minister told Canadians on national TV that only Gomery could tell who was responsible for the organized ad scam scandal, but all the while he knew that clause k explicitly prevented Gomery from naming names.

Day after day televised evidence leaves no doubt that the stain on our nation's honour was put there by the Liberal Party. Gomery's report will just be a summary of facts we already know.

Is it not true that the government is just inventing excuses to hold off the day of reckoning?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, those members are attacking the mandate of Justice Gomery in another attempt to try to smear the work that he is doing. They realize that when he reports to Canadians, Canadians will have a balanced review and analysis of all the facts and that will be exactly the opposite of what they provide to Canadians on a daily basis on the floor of the House of Commons.

Those members amplify and magnify the testimony that suits their particular partisan position.

Canadians want the whole truth and they trust Justice Gomery to give them exactly that. His mandate provides him with every opportunity to do that.

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JUSTICE

Mr. Vic Toews (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a top Liberal has given sworn testimony at the Gomery commission that many court appointments in Canada have been based on political consideration and merit plays a secondary role. As long as the Liberal government controls the process, the political pedigree of any candidate will be the overriding consideration.

The Minister of Justice has stubbornly refused to turn the matter over to an independent body for examination when he knows Gomery has no jurisdiction. What is he afraid it will uncover?

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the body is not controlled by the Liberals. It is an independent body. It was the same body that the hon. member presided over. It was good enough for him when he was the attorney general of Manitoba and it is good enough for us when we are the Government of Canada.

Mr. Vic Toews (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the justice minister understands perfectly well the distinction between an independent body and the body that controls federal judicial appointments. The denials of the minister are simply not enough. An independent investigation is needed to clear the air. It is more than a coincidence that predominantly Liberal Party loyalists get appointed to the bench, including the minister's former chief of staff.

Why does the minister refuse to put into place a transparent public process that actually limits political patronage?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member earlier referenced Gomery and the work of Justice Gomery. It is important to realize that recently constituents of the hon. member started receiving householders that he sent out. In that householder he said:

—we in the Conservative Party, believe that more testimony must be heard. And we believe that the Canadian public deserves a chance to hear, understand, and evaluate this evidence. This will obviously take some time. Our party is not interested in the electoral calculations of the Bloc Québécois, nor do we wish to have any part of pre-empting further evidence...We will not allow the separatists' dangerous, narrow electoral agenda to dictate that of the entire country.

That is what he said—

●(1435)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe-Bagot.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

TRANSFER PAYMENTS

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the budget implementation bill is unacceptable to Quebec. It does not include any measures to eliminate the fiscal imbalance. Yet, Jean Charest and Benoît Pelletier expect the federal government to provide better funding for post-secondary education, something which, in their opinion, would be a first step in solving the fiscal imbalance issue.

How can the government explain that its budget does not include any solution to the fiscal imbalance, even though it recognized its existence in the throne speech?

[English]

Hon. John McKay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is no such thing as a fiscal imbalance. I would remind the hon. member that 25 years ago the argument was that all the money was in the provinces and all the needs were in the federal government. Now they argue that all the needs are in the provinces and all the money is in the federal government. Twenty-five years ago they found that there was no structural imbalance. Provinces have the same access to resources and to revenue sources as does the federal government.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the federal contribution accounts for 11.5% of the funding for post-secondary education, while at one time it accounted for 50%.

Does the government realize that, if it really wants to follow up on its commitments set out in the throne speech and provide a real solution to the fiscal imbalance, it must increase transfers for post-secondary education?

[English]

Hon. John McKay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is a very simple solution to the hon. member's inquiry, and that is on Thursday night support Bill C-43 and Bill C-48.

* * *

[Translation]

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, during the last election campaign, the Prime Minister was as proud as could be to announce that Quebec would receive money for child care with no strings attached.

How does the Prime Minister explain that a year after making that promise there is still no agreement with Quebec?

[English]

Hon. Ken Dryden (Minister of Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said many times in the House, we have ongoing negotiations and discussions with the province of Quebec. We are very hopeful that those negotiations will end up in an agreement.

[Translation]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister should know that an unconditional transfer would be very easy to negotiate.

In that context, how can the Prime Minister sign agreements with five provinces and tell us that negotiations with Quebec are ongoing when it should be a mere formality? Let him explain.

[English]

Hon. Ken Dryden (Minister of Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the first step that needs to be taken in all of this, in order for money to be transferred to the provinces under any agreement, is to pass the budget on Thursday night.

* * *

CANADA POST

Mr. Brian Pallister (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it does not appear that the government has any interest in solving the case of André Ouellet's missing receipts. As recently as March of this year, the Canada Post minister told this House that he still did not have the receipts. Yet yesterday, before the government operations committee, Mr. Ouellet testified under oath that he sent the minister the receipts in December of last year.

Will the minister now admit that his department has had the receipts since December of 2004?

[Translation]

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday in a parliamentary committee, the hon. member challenged the right of a witness to respond to him in French. I hope today he will be so kind as to allow me to respond to him in French.

My response is that what he just said is not true. There was no political interference in the past and there will be none in the future.

● (1440)

[English]

Mr. Brian Pallister (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister is as evasive today as Mr. Ouellet was yesterday.

The Liberals are not interested in getting to the bottom of this issue. For every other Canadian, tax rules are straightforward: no receipts and we pay a taxable benefit. Mr. Ouellet claims he lost almost \$200,000 worth of receipts and "the dog ate my homework".

The same rules that apply to everyone else must apply to Liberal fat cats in this country. Or is "I lost the receipts" now an acceptable excuse for Revenue Canada tax officials?

[Translation]

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the matter is still being investigated.

Not only did this member insult French Canadians with his remarks on bilingualism, but he is also challenging the professionalism of 30,000 public servants at the Canada Revenue Agency. He should apologize to French Canadians and those public servants.

*Oral Questions**[English]***ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS**

Mr. Jim Prentice (Calgary Centre-North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Deputy Prime Minister continues to struggle with the residential school file. To date the government has spent \$625 million on the residential school fiasco and has settled with less than 2% of the possible claimants.

Now the government is reportedly negotiating a \$3 billion to \$4 billion deal with the AFN to settle the claims of 80,000 people who have not sued the government, yet it ignores the class actions of 15,000 people who have sued the government.

Can the Deputy Prime Minister tell the House what she is doing and what happened to the ADR—

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Prime Minister.

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the ADR process continues as it should. We are working with the claimants, the claimants' lawyers, the AFN and other interested parties.

This is a very difficult issue. It is part of a horrible tragedy that happened to a significant number of aboriginal Canadians. I think the hon. member acts in good faith on this issue, but I would encourage him to be patient and to understand that we are working with all the key interested parties to try to reach a fair and transparent result for—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Calgary Centre-North.

[Translation]

Mr. Jim Prentice (Calgary Centre-North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is terrible. The proposed settlement with the AFN should exceed \$3 billion. Neither the February 2005 budget nor the budgetary fireworks since created by the Liberals and the NDP include any funding for this settlement.

Could the Minister of Finance explain to the House where this money will come from? Are we talking about an informal budget?

[English]

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, I think the question was perhaps not as clear as it could have been, but if the hon. member is in fact talking about our negotiations with the AFN, the claimants, the claimants' lawyers, the churches and other interested parties, let me say that those discussions continue.

We have a shared objective to try to deal with as many claimants as possible, as fairly and as quickly as possible. That is what we are doing. That is what the ADR process is about. That is what our discussions with all interested parties are about.

* * *

THE BUDGET

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Conservative members from Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia sat on their hands when the Liberal Party stood in favour of the budget and the Atlantic accord. Now the

Conservatives want to vote for one budget implementation bill while voting against the other.

Could the minister clarify what the status of the Atlantic accord would be if the opposition defeats the second part of the budget implementation bill?

• (1445)

Hon. Tony Valeri (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member said, the Conservatives are now saying that they will vote to support the budget and the government, and then, 10 minutes later, they will vote no confidence and bring down the government.

There are two confidence votes tomorrow. It does not matter which one they defeat. If they defeat a budget bill, they defeat the government and they defeat the Atlantic accord. They defeat the new deal for cities. They defeat child care. They defeat funding for the environment. They defeat funding for post-secondary education. They defeat affordable housing.

Conservatives need to be straight with Canadians. Canadians will not be fooled. The Conservatives need to take responsibility for defeating the budget.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the new NDP budget provisions certainly improve the lives of people and improve our environment. They have received a favourable response from Canadians right across this country.

We expect that the government will soon be introducing measures to implement these very important new budget provisions. I would like the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance to update Canadians about progress by the government for implementing these measures and ask if he could give some details about where we are with respect to these very important new budget provisions.

Hon. Tony Valeri (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think what the hon. member is referring to are the votes on Thursday evening, which are votes at second reading. Subsequent to that, the budget bills, if successful, will flow to committee where in fact I am sure there will be committee deliberation.

An hon. member: Is that how it works?

Hon. Tony Valeri: Mr. Speaker, it seems that I have to explain to those hon. members across the way how it works, because there is some confusion. While those members expect to vote for one budget bill and defeat the other, they actually presume that they are not defeating the government. In fact, they are.

I would say to them to support the budget, support the Atlantic accord, support the increase in tuition fee funding, support the increase in foreign aid, support the new deal for cities and communities, and do what is right for Canada.

*Oral Questions***SHIPBUILDING INDUSTRY**

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question for the Minister of Industry is quite simple. For years now the industry minister has had on his desk a shipbuilding policy designed by the industry and shipyard workers throughout the country. From Victoria to Marystown, Halifax, Lévis and Port Weller, we have the capability, we have the industry and we have the workers to build these ships that Canada so desperately needs.

We cannot help but notice that the federal government is moving to assist the auto sector, which we support, and it is willing to assist the aerospace sector, which we support. We would also support the government if it put in a new shipbuilding policy so that our industry and our workers can get back to work.

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this government has had a shipbuilding policy in place since 2001. In fact, I met on Monday of this week with members of the shipbuilding and marine industrial sector from across the country.

We are having a discussion about how to update that strategy to ensure that our Canadian shipbuilding industry is technologically sophisticated and competitive, so that it can be competitive in the world economy and win government contracts for Coast Guard and other defence vessels.

* * *

OIL AND GAS INDUSTRY

Mr. David Chatters (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is vitally important to the Canadian economy that we have access to our northern natural gas. Esso, Shell and ConocoPhillips have halted their work on the \$7 billion Mackenzie Valley pipeline project due to unreasonable demands from aboriginal groups and mounting red tape from this government.

The government is sitting on the sidelines watching this project go down the drain. Why has the government failed to move this project forward?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, far from sitting on the sidelines, we are working with the government of the Northwest Territories. Premier Handley was in town last week. We are in fact working on the regulatory process. We have met with the producers. Premier Handley on Friday met in Calgary with aboriginal proponents of this project.

It is a very complex project, one of the most complex regulatory processes under way anywhere right now, I think it is fair to say. Everybody has the shared objective to make sure the Mackenzie gas flows south in a timely fashion. That is what we are all—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Westlock—St. Paul.

Mr. David Chatters (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the problem is that the gas is not flowing in a timely fashion.

The government has also dropped the ball on the Alaska pipeline. We have a 27-year-old piece of legislation which is outdated and is now threatening to tie up the entire Alaska pipeline project for years in court. I raised this issue in the House with the minister two years ago and was simply dismissed.

Enbridge is now threatening legal action on this issue, yet the minister is not doing anything to resolve the issue. Why has the government been sitting on its hands for the past 12 years and doing nothing to move this project forward?

● (1450)

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would presume the hon. member knows enough about the Alaska gas project to know that in fact it is a project driven by the private sector. The resource is owned by the state of Alaska. In fact, it is up to the producers to undertake discussions with the state of Alaska as to how the project moves forward. Absolutely, there has to be infrastructure to move the gas south below the 49th parallel.

In fact, for the hon. member to suggest that this government has been inactive or that this government is the problem reflects the fact that the member knows nothing about Alaska gas, who owns it or who is going to move it.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when the present government was asked in the House if it would get involved in the development of the Lower Churchill project, the minister of the day said:

—the climate change issue is not an opportunity for every provincial project in every area that may have a minor climate change element at a high cost to be funded by the federal government.

Does the government still feel the same way about this project?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the very strong climate change plan we have, which we hope will survive the whirlwind and which we hope the House will unanimously support through the budget, we offered to provinces to have a partnership fund to decrease greenhouse gas emissions in joint priorities.

If it is a joint priority to develop hydroelectricity, for instance, we will do it. We will then strengthen the energy security of the country and we will reach our Kyoto target. It depends on what the provinces want to do with us.

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government is clawing back 90% of Newfoundland and Labrador's revenues from the Voisey's Bay development. Why will the government not agree to renegotiate its contract with the province of Newfoundland and Labrador in order to provide a more equitable revenue sharing plan?

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as members know, we have an agreement, the Atlantic accord, and we are taking care of Newfoundland and Labrador and its revenues.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

FOREST INDUSTRY

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Tembec forestry products has announced that it will be closing four plants, which will mean the loss of 459 jobs, 403 of those in Quebec. The government has continued to turn a deaf ear to our appeals and is refusing to create an aid package for the softwood lumber industry.

Is the closure of these four plants not, unfortunately, an illustration and proof of the negligence of the government which, in refusing to follow up on our recommendations for a recovery plan, has brought about the negative outcome we are seeing today?

Hon. Jacques Saada (Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec and Minister responsible for the Francophonie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are injecting an average of \$25 million to \$30 million specifically into communities affected by the softwood lumber situation.

We and the Government of Quebec have agreed to take part in a co-ordinating committee to lessen the impact of provincial bill 71.

We have never had any request of any kind from Tembec. We cannot respond to a request that has not been made.

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, how can the minister be boasting about his budget when it contains nothing for companies affected by the softwood lumber crisis, even though that crisis has now been going on for three years and there is no end to the job losses?

Hon. Jacques Saada (Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec and Minister responsible for the Francophonie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if I do not keep tight control over my emotions, I will end up in tears over the sudden interest in economic development from a party that is voting against the budget, voting against a \$309 million increase in the budget, voting against Bill C-9, and voting against the economic reinforcement of Quebec.

This is the lowest kind of petty politics, and has nothing at all to do with the issues at hand.

* * *

• (1455)

[English]

SUDAN

Mr. Stockwell Day (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unilateral action is not the way to resolve the crisis in Darfur. Last week the Prime Minister did not consult with African Union leaders, NATO leaders or even the head of the Sudanese government before rushing to make an announcement that he was sending Canadian military into Darfur without our allies, without the Sudanese government knowing, and without even the means to protect themselves.

Helping people in Darfur is too important to ignore these things. Why did he not at least warn the African Union leaders that he was about to take unilateral action in Darfur?

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is absolutely wrong. There have been the appropriate consultations. The Prime Minister and I have conducted consultations with the government in Iran, the United Nations, the African Union and the government of Sudan.

I spoke again with the secretary general of NATO two days ago on the telephone. The catalytic leadership that the Government of Canada is providing when there are thousands of people who are dying, who are being raped and who are starving is very much appreciated.

Mr. Stockwell Day (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is not catalytic leadership; it is catatonic leadership.

I have a statement which was released today by the leaders of Egypt, Libya, Chad, Nigeria, Sudan, Gabon and Eritrea. They said that they reject any foreign intervention in the Darfur problem. Today in Brussels the African Union president, Alpha Konare, said that there will be no troops on the ground unless they are exclusively African. The Sudanese ambassador to Canada said that her country will not allow Canadian military into Darfur.

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have always been very clear that we will be complementary to what the African Union is doing. We will be supporting the African Union exercise. We have always said exactly that.

What we do know is that where the African Union has been in Darfur it has been helpful, but more boots on the ground are needed in the region, more than the 3,000 they have now. They need better communications equipment. Canada can do something about that. They need better transportation vehicles. Canada can help with NATO to do the right thing in Darfur.

* * *

SENIORS

Ms. Bonnie Brown (Oakville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the health and welfare of Canadian seniors is very important to me, and I believe to all my colleagues in the House.

I would like the Minister of State for Families and Caregivers to outline for all of us the improvements for seniors contained in budget 2005.

Hon. Tony Ianno (Minister of State (Families and Caregivers), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this Liberal government believes in the value and the well-being of our seniors. Our seniors have helped build this nation to what it is today. In this budget there is \$2.7 billion over five years to ensure our seniors are given the respect and the dignity they deserve.

We ask the members opposite to support our seniors and vote for the budget because they believe in it. We ask them to do so also.

*Oral Questions***STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT
OPERATIONS AND ESTIMATES**

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Public Works often says he is open and accountable, but his actions say he is not. We just cannot trust what he says. The truth is that he refuses to attend the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates to be held accountable on the 2005-06 spending estimates for his department.

Will the chair of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates tell this House and Canadians the truth about the minister's disrespectful treatment of this committee?

The Speaker: The hon. member knows that questions to committee chairs are permitted, but they are to deal with the agenda of the committee and not testimony that is given in committee.

An hon. member: It is about the agenda.

The Speaker: It did not sound like the agenda to me. He asked for comments on the minister's testimony and that is not the agenda in committee. I am sorry, but there are limits.

The hon. member for Cambridge.

* * *

• (1500)

HEALTH

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my first question in this House was with regard to the accreditation process for foreign trained doctors. Forty-four billion dollars later and there is absolutely no change.

The last budget—the first one, I should say—just has 50¢ per Ontarian, and that will not solve this problem. Doctors are driving cabs while the lineups get longer.

Will the minister please get serious and get a plan about helping the one million people in Ontario who do not have doctors, not in 2008, not in 2012, but right now?

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the last health accord \$41 billion was provided to the provinces for this purpose and other purposes in health care. There is \$250 million a year ongoing in terms of training that is implicit and embedded in that health accord.

We just provided \$75 million over five years to create residencies across the country. That money will flow to the provinces. That will create new positions for residencies for foreign trained doctors.

* * *

[Translation]

CLOTHING AND TEXTILE INDUSTRY

Mr. Alain Boire (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the textile plants that remain continue to shut down in Huntingdon and elsewhere in Quebec. This clearly shows that, in its present form, the government's improvised rescue plan cannot solve the crisis.

In light of the mediocre results of its plan, what is the government waiting for to put forward a true plan that would include, among

other measures, safeguards, a program for older workers, and a program to support the modernization of the clothing and textile sectors?

Hon. Jacques Saada (Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec and Minister responsible for the Francophonie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, long before plants began shutting down, we had the pleasure, through the Suroît-Sud renewal committee, of meeting with municipal and local economic stakeholders. We were involved in the renewal plan. Through the Canadian apparel and textile industries program, or CATIP, and then through the Canadian textiles program, or CANtex, we offered funding to industry members, but they did not avail themselves of those funds. We are still there.

We have already said that, if there are investment opportunities in infrastructure, we will follow up on a prioritization by the Quebec government. We will always be there for the residents of Huntingdon.

* * *

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on May 2 the Government of Canada announced that a full panel review would be undertaken to assess the cleanup of the Sydney tar ponds. The Minister of the Environment assured the community at that time that a stringent timeline would be followed and there would be no delay in this process.

As the first critical timeline benchmark approaches, does the Minister of the Environment remain committed to the June 2006 deadline for receiving the review panel's report?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, because of the \$280 million that the federal government will invest in the Sydney tar ponds and the \$120 million the province will invest, after fruitful discussions I may tell the House that I have no doubt that we will reach an agreement on the review process going forward in the near future. There will be no unnecessary delay in the cleanup of this area.

I will receive the review panel report. The panel will report back to me no later than June 30, 2006.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of His Excellency Dimitrij Rupel, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia and Chairman-in-Office for the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Routine Proceedings

●(1505)

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my point of order arises from question period and a question which was being asked of me as the chair of the government operations and estimates committee regarding the agenda of that committee. You yourself said that questions are allowed on the agenda of the committee. The member was asking about why the public works minister has twice agreed to come to this committee and has both times broken his word to the committee. He is showing contempt for—

The Speaker: The hon. member's question did not ask about any of that sort of thing. In the preamble what I heard had nothing to do with appearances. He asked if the minister had said something to the committee about something, and it says right here, "Questions seeking information about the schedule and agenda of committees may be directed to chairs of committees", but that is it.

I will review the blues, but this question, to my hearing, did not ask about the agenda of the committee. It asked about something the minister may have said or not said. That is what I heard and that is why I ruled it out of order. I am quite prepared to review the blues in light of the comments that have been made but I do not feel the question was in order.

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would simply like to reiterate what the chair of the committee has said and ask you to please look at the blues from today's question period. The question was simply about the agenda. No testimony was mentioned in my question.

The Speaker: I will certainly double-check the question but what I heard did not sound like a question about agenda, so we will leave it at that.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all, my apologies for not sending you a little note because this question also arises from question period.

One of the questions asked by one of the backbenchers over there in my view is a clear violation of Standing Order 18 where it states, "No Member may reflect upon any vote of the House, except for the purpose of moving that such vote be rescinded".

That question very clearly reflected not on a vote in the House but on one which has not even been held yet. I am amazed that you considered that question to be in order.

The Speaker: I remember vaguely the question to which the hon. member is referring. There were statements in the preamble to the question that appeared to deal with votes, or future votes or past votes and it was hard for the Chair to tell which, but then the question did not appear to have to do with the votes. It had to do with whether the thing was a matter of confidence or something like that. That is my recollection of the question, but I will be happy to review it for the benefit of the hon. member for Edmonton—Sherwood Park and get back to the House in due course.

The preamble was risky. I thought the question was fine, but I will double-check.

* * *

CHIEF ELECTORAL OFFICER

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table the report of the Chief Electoral Officer entitled "Enhancing the Values of Redistribution: Recommendations from the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada Following the Representation Order of 2003".

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS[*English*]**GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS**

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to three petitions.

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INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Hon. Jean Augustine (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian delegation of the Canada-Africa Parliamentary Association, which visited South Africa from March 29 to April 1 on the occasion of the third session of the pan-African Parliament held in Midrand, South Africa.

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●(1510)

[*Translation*]**COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE**

HUMAN RESOURCES, SKILLS DEVELOPMENT, SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE STATUS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities entitled, "An Examination of New Directions Governing Contribution Agreements for Selected Programs Delivered on Behalf of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada".

[*English*]

I wish to thank my colleague, the NDP member for Sault Ste. Marie, for bringing forward this initiative to review the government's new directives governing contribution agreements for selected programs delivered on behalf of HSDC.

Some of the concerns we heard from witnesses included the short timeframes to respond to proposals and how the selection criteria is used at times to the disadvantage of tested and established programs.

Routine Proceedings

[Translation]

Once again, I want to thank and congratulate all my colleagues in the government, the official opposition, the Bloc Québécois and the NDP for their contributions, openness and objectivity during our very stimulating discussions.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the eighth report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade on the main estimates, under Foreign Affairs and International Trade, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2006.

I also have the honour to present, in both official languages, the ninth report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade entitled "Dispute Settlement in the NAFTA: Fixing an Agreement under Siege".

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to these reports.

[English]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Paul Steckle (Huron—Bruce, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fifth report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food. In accordance with its order of reference of Friday, February 25, 2005 the committee has considered Votes 1, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35 and 40 under agriculture and agri-food in the main estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2006, and reports the same less the amounts granted in interim supply.

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[Translation]

INCOME TAX ACT

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-395, an act to amend the Income Tax Act (child care expenses).

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce this bill which seeks to help families, where one of the spouses operates a business or is an independent worker, by allowing the spouse with the higher income to claim the child care expenses.

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

* * *

BROADCASTING ACT

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-396, an act to amend the Broadcasting Act and the Income Tax Act (closed-captioned programming).

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am always pleased to reintroduce this bill, especially in the month of May, Speech and Hearing Awareness Month. The purpose of this bill is to require broadcasters to provide closed captions for their video programming. It also amends the Income Tax Act to allow a tax deduction for broadcasters for the purchase of closed-captioning technology.

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

● (1515)

[English]

PETITIONS

MARRIAGE

Mr. Paul Steckle (Huron—Bruce, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table a number of petitions which include several thousands of names of residents who draw to the attention of the House the issue that the moral good of society be protected as we elected officials make judgments in the House and as we pass laws.

The petitioners believe that the defence of traditional marriage as the bond between one man and one woman is a serious moral good. They also believe that marriage is the lasting union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of others, and cannot and should not be modified by a legislative act or court of law.

The petitioners request that Parliament take whatever action is required to maintain the current definition of marriage in law and perpetuity, and to prevent any court from overturning or amending that definition.

JUVENILE DIABETES

Mr. Russ Hiebert (South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to present a petition on behalf of some Canadians concerned about type 1 juvenile diabetes. They are asking the government to consider funding research into this type of diabetes over the next five years.

AUTISM

Mr. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition signed by 450 individuals from the greater Vancouver area. They are asking Parliament to amend the Canada Health Act to include, as medically necessary, therapy for children suffering from autism.

The petitioners also ask Parliament to contribute to the creation of academic chairs at Canadian universities dedicated to the research and treatment of autism.

[Translation]

MARRIAGE

Mr. Robert Vincent (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, at the request of some of my constituents, I am tabling a petition regarding Bill C-38.

[English]

AGRICULTURE

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have three petitions.

The first two petitions request that Parliament recognize the prices that exist in the entire agri-food industry in Canada, and that the Canadian Ontario BSE recovery program be extended and funded to treat fairly and equitably all those suffering as a result of a single found case of BSE.

PROPERTY RIGHTS

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the third petition calls upon Parliament to correct the mistake of 1982 and amend the Constitution Act of 1867 to include the right to own, use and earn a living from private property.

MARRIAGE

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition on behalf of residents of my riding of Mississauga South on the subject matter of marriage.

The petitioners want to draw to the attention of the House that the majority of Canadians believe that the legal definition of marriage is a voluntary union of a single man and a single woman. They also point out that fundamental matters of social policy should be decided by elected members of Parliament and not by the unelected judiciary.

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

[*Translation*]

CORRECTIONAL SERVICE OF CANADA

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to table a petition signed by more than 1,000 members of the Union of Canadian Correctional Officers-CSN, who have been working without a collective agreement for three years. They are calling on the Treasury Board to negotiate a suitable pension plan.

[*English*]

MARRIAGE

Mr. Gurmant Grewal (Newton—North Delta, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today on behalf of the residents of Newton—North Delta to present several petitions calling upon Parliament to use all possible legislative and administrative measures to preserve and protect the current definition of marriage as the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

IMMIGRATION

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today on behalf of the constituents of Fleetwood—Port Kells to present a petition signed by hundreds of people from the city of Surrey and surrounding communities.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to review the deportation order against the Funes family of Surrey. In particular, they wish parliamentarians to consider the probable consequences if the family is forced to return to El Salvador. They wish us to review the case and allow the Funes family to remain in Canada.

•(1520)

AUTISM

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present another petition on behalf of my constituents in Fleetwood—Port Kells who wish to bring to the attention of the House that children suffering from autism spectrum

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disorder are among the weakest and most vulnerable sector of Canadian society, and that the rate of children being diagnosed with ASD is high and increasing at an alarming rate.

The petitioners therefore call upon Parliament to amend the Canada Health Act and corresponding regulations to include intensive behavioural intervention therapy for children with autism as a medically necessary treatment and for the creation of academic chairs at a university in each province to teach IBI treatment, so that Canadian professionals will no longer have to leave the country to receive training in this field.

TAXATION

Ms. Helena Guergis (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour today to present a petition to the House of over 800 names from the people of my riding of Simcoe—Grey. All of these constituents call upon the Government of Canada to change the Income Tax Act to allow spouses to pay taxes as if the total family income were earned equally. This is known as income splitting.

[*Translation*]

REFUGEES

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Mr. Speaker, at the request and on behalf of thousands of individuals, I am tabling a petition calling on the government to immediately implement a refugee appeal section, as passed by this House.

[*English*]

MARRIAGE

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my first petition is from a number of petitioners calling on Parliament to use all possible legislative and administrative measures, including the invoking of the notwithstanding clause if necessary, to preserve the correct definition of marriage as the union of one man and one woman.

CANADA POST

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, another petition that I am tabling is from several hundred residents of Hepburn, Saskatchewan, who are concerned about the possibility of their rural post office being closed by Canada Post. The petitioners are calling on the government to ensure that such a move does not take place.

STEM CELL RESEARCH

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a third petition I am tabling today is from 46 Canadians who are calling on the government to focus its stem cell funding dollars on adult or non-embryonic stem cell research. They say that non-embryonic stem cell research has produced beneficial health results and it does not result in the taking of human life.

CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC): Lastly, Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure of tabling a petition from people in Prince Edward Island who call on the government to return to its previous policy of allowing holy books to be made available to new citizens at citizenship ceremonies around the country.

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These petitioners note that a citizenship judge terminated this policy alleging that the policy discriminated against non-religious immigrants. Up to last year holy books were simply displayed on tables at the back of the hall free for new citizens to take. These new citizens were not handed the books. They were not forced on them. The judge produced no evidence to justify his inappropriate decision to ban the availability of holy books.

Therefore, these petitioners ask for the citizenship commission to return to the previous policy of just a few years back which has served our multicultural nation so very well over so many years.

MARIJUANA

Mrs. Betty Hinton (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to rise today to present a petition in memory of RCMP officers Brock Myrol, Leo Johnston, Anthony Gordon and Peter Schiemann.

The petitioners state:

“We the undersigned residents of Canada draw the attention of the House to the following:

That the tragic deaths of four RCMP officers reinforces our belief that decriminalizing the possession of marijuana will only serve to increase the number of grow operations throughout the country; that the number of Canadian youth using marijuana will increase throughout our country; that the use of marijuana damages the health and well-being of our citizens; that the decriminalization of possession of marijuana signals to the—

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member knows she cannot read the petition to the House. I know she will give a brief summary.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: Mr. Speaker, the petitioners ask that Bill C-17 and any legislation designed to decriminalize the possession and use of marijuana be withdrawn.

CANADA POST

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a series of petitions that I would like to table with respect to the closure of rural post offices. The petitioners call upon Parliament to keep the Grenfell post office open and retain the moratorium on rural post office closures. It is signed by 120 residents of that community.

There is another petition similar in type and vein relating to the Fleming post office signed by 59 residents of that community, as well as the community of Minton, Saskatchewan.

I have 108 residents of Torquay, Saskatchewan asking that the Torquay post office remain open and that the moratorium on rural post offices be maintained.

Additionally, I have 248 residents from the community of Stoughton, Saskatchewan asking that the petition be filed as well.

●(1525)

AUTISM

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have another petition relating to autism. The petitioners are asking Parliament to amend the Canada Health Act and corresponding regulations to include therapy for children with

autism as a medically necessary treatment and require all provinces to provide or fund this essential treatment for autism.

MARRIAGE

Mr. Greg Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions from my riding of New Brunswick Southwest, mainly the citizens of the Grand Bay-Westfield area, Nerepis area and that section of the riding.

The petitioners are calling on Parliament to pass legislation defining marriage as the union between one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Greg Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have another petition which I know that you would be interested in because the petitioners are from Saint Andrews, New Brunswick, and I know you are familiar with that area as well as Bayside and St. Stephen.

The petitioners are calling upon Parliament to enact legislation that would prohibit the transport of LNG tankers through Head Harbour Passage bound for a refinery or an LNG terminal in Eastport, Maine.

I know the House wants clarification on this. Basically those LNG tankers can only get to the United States if they pass through this very dangerous Canadian passage. The petitioners are asking the Government of Canada to say no to the passage of those ships. I know, Mr. Speaker, that you would like to see that happen.

Hon. Don Boudria: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I would like to revert to the presentation of reports from committees. I have changes in committee membership to make for both sides of the House.

The Speaker: Does the House give its consent to the hon. member to return to presenting reports from committees?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Hon. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present the 39th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding the membership of certain committees of the House, and I would like to move concurrence at this time.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the following questions will be answered today: Nos. 122 and 123.

[Text]

Question No. 122—**Mr. Dean Allison:**

Since October 23, 1993, did Ekos or its principals receive any: (a) grants, contributions or loan guarantees and, if so, (i) what was the source (i.e., department, agency, crown corporation, special operating agency or foundation), value, date made and reasons for providing the funding in each case, (ii) what is their present status, whether paid, repaid, or unpaid, including the value of the repayment, (iii) what was the total amount received; and (b) contracts and, if so, (i) were the contracts fulfilled, (ii) what were their contract number, source, value, date made, reasons for providing the funding, (iii) were these contracts tendered and if the tendering was limited what would be the reason for the limitation, (iv) what was the total amount of contracts obtained, and what was the total amount of all the funds provided to Ekos or its principals, (v) was it a standing offer, and, if so, what was the number and type of standing offer?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):

Question No. 122 is extremely broad. It targets over 140 government organizations, many of which have undergone significant organizational and systems changes over the 12 year period covered by the question. The length of the question makes the task all the more difficult given that, under the applicable government records retention policy, federal departments usually keep their records for a period of six years only.

Extensive work has already been done to collect the relevant information from more than 140 government organizations in answer to this question. However, and in spite of the extensive efforts invested so far, the work is not yet finalized and a verification of the information has not yet been completed. Thus, more time is needed to perform the type of quality control that is necessary to ensure that the information provided to the House is as comprehensive and reliable as possible.

The government will provide a supplementary reply to this question as soon as the requested information is ready.

Question No. 123—**Mr. Dean Allison:**

Since October 23, 1993, did Earncliffe or Veraxis or their principals receive any: (a) grants, contributions or loan guarantees and, if so, (i) what was the source (i.e., department, agency, crown corporation, special operating agency or foundation), value, date made and reasons for providing the funding in each case, (ii) what is their present status, whether paid, repaid, or unpaid, including the value of the repayment, (iii) what was the total amount each company received; and (b) contracts and, if so, (i) were the contracts fulfilled, (ii) what were their contract number, source, value, date made, reasons for providing the funding, (iii) were these contracts tendered and if the tendering was limited what would be the reason for the limitation, (iv) what was the total amount of contracts each company obtained, and what was the total amount of all the funds provided to these companies, (v) was it a standing offer, and, if so, what was the number and type of standing offer?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):

Question No. 123 is extremely broad. It targets over 140 government organizations, many of which have undergone significant organizational and systems changes over the 12 year period covered by the question. The length of the question makes the task all the more difficult given that, under the applicable government records retention policy, federal departments usually keep their records for a period of six years only.

Extensive work has already been done to collect the relevant information from more than 140 government organizations in answer to this question. However, and in spite of the extensive efforts invested so far, the work is not yet finalized and a verification of the

Routine Proceedings

information has not yet been completed. Thus, more time is needed to perform the type of quality control that is necessary to ensure that the information provided to the House is as comprehensive and reliable as possible.

The government will provide a supplementary reply to this question as soon as the requested information is ready.

* * *

[English]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if Question No. 124 could be made an order for return, the return would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 124—**Mr. Daryl Kramp:**

What suppliers have received current standing offers with the government, including all agencies, crown corporations, and foundations and, in each case (listed in order of the greatest amount to the smallest amount of business), specifying: (a) the standing offer number; (b) name of the supplier; (c) the name and address of the company (if different from supplier name); (d) type of standing offer; (e) date the standing offer was granted; (f) type of goods or services provided; (g) department, agency or crown corporation that awarded the contract; (h) total amount of business assigned to the supplier by the department, agency or crown corporation; and (i) the total amount of untendered business to the supplier by the department, agency or crown corporation?

(Return tabled)

[English]

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

[Translation]

MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is my first opportunity as Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons to address one of these questions. I would ask you to call motion No. P-11

[English]

That an Order of this House do issue for: (a) the significant incident report(s) or a summary of significant incident reports issued with regard to HMCS Chicoutimi between October 2 and 6, 2004; (b) after-action reports issued in regard to HMCS Chicoutimi between October 2 and 6, 2004; and (c) a summary and/or a list of sea trials conducted by HMCS Chicoutimi prior to its departure from the United Kingdom for Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Government Orders

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Notice of Motion for the Production of Papers No. P-1, in the name of the hon. member for Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley is acceptable to the government, subject to the usual reservations concerning confidential information, and the documents are tabled immediately.

• (1530)

The Speaker: Subject to the reservations or conditions expressed by the parliamentary secretary is it the pleasure of the House that Notice of Motion No. P-1 be deemed to have been adopted?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): I would ask you to call Motion No. P-3.

That an Order of the House do issue for copies of the call log and all documents pertaining to the call log, including ministerial briefing notes, referred to in the exchange in the House on Thursday, October 21, 2004, between the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and the Member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, Notice of Motion for the Production of Papers No. P-3, in the name of the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands, is acceptable to the government and the documents are tabled immediately.

(Motion agreed to)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): I would ask you to call Motion No. P-6.

That an Order of the House do issue for copies of all studies and reports prepared by Donald Savoie for the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, relating to the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, Notice of Motion for the Production of Papers and No. P-6 in the name of the hon. member for New Brunswick Southwest, is acceptable to the government and the documents are also tabled immediately.

(Motion agreed to)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, I would ask that all other Notices of Motions for the Production of Papers be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is it agreed that the remaining Notices of Motions for the Production of Papers be allowed to stand?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among all parties.

[*Translation*]

I have two motions to present for this evening's debate.

[*English*]

I will present the first motion and then the second motion. I believe you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That during today's debate on the business of supply, pursuant to Standing Order 81 (4), no quorum calls, dilatory motions or requests for unanimous consent shall be entertained by the Speaker.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, there have been discussions among all parties and I believe you will find unanimous consent for the following motion.

[*English*]

The motion regarding this evening's debate in the committee of the whole of the main estimates is this. I move:

That notwithstanding Standing Order 81(4)(a), within each 15 minute period, each party may allocate time to one or more of its members for speeches or for questions and answers, provided that, in the case of questions and answers, the minister's answer approximately reflects the time taken by the question, and provided that, in the case of speeches, members of the party to which the period is allocated may speak one after the other.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

Hon. Keith Martin: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order to seek the unanimous consent of the House to return to the tabling of documents.

The Speaker: Does the hon. parliamentary secretary have the unanimous consent of the House to return to the tabling of documents?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

An hon. member: No.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2005

The House resumed from May 17 consideration of the motion that Bill C-43, an act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on February 23, 2005, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the motion that this question be now put.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise in the House today. We look across the floor at a government that is corrupt and ruining our country's finances. We have seen this corruption exemplified by the Liberal ad scam, the \$2 billion gun registry and the \$1 billion boondoggle of HRDC. However, in the latest effort of the government in its NDP budget, we find a more egregious waste of tax dollars.

Government Orders

I suggest that perhaps the most outrageous example of hidden costs contained in the budget are found in its seemingly altruistic promise to bring in a government day care bureaucracy. Liberals are telling the Canadian people that they can bring in a government day care bureaucracy, applicable to every child, at the cost of \$1 billion a year. In reality, we know the cost of this program is approximately 10 times that amount.

The government day care bureaucracy will impose a \$10 billion a year burden on taxpayers and take away choices from women and families. I will demonstrate that today irrefutably with the evidence I have on my desk. However, better than that, I will bring hope to Canadians by proposing an alternative that gives choice to women and families. The Conservative Party and its leader believe in a woman's right to choose how to raise her children. That right we are prepared to defend on the floor of the House of Commons.

Let us start by demonstrating that the Liberals' plan is 10 times more costly than they are prepared to allow Canadian people to understand. Recall that the Liberals said that the gun registry would cost only \$2 million. It is now 1,000 times over budget. We on this side of the House gave warnings, which were unheeded. Thus, today we have a \$2 billion monstrosity that not only harasses duck hunters and farmers and takes choices away from them, but imposes greater burdens on taxpayers.

Likewise, we have before us the government day care bureaucracy. I will look at the evidence. The government tells us that the program will cost only \$5 billion over five years, in other words, approximately \$1 billion a year. However, let us look at the words of minister responsible for social development. I do not know if he realized that he was being recorded when he made this promise at a community event. He said:

And the nice thing about it all \$5 billion over five years does not create a system. What it does is set things in motion.

He went on to say that the \$5 billion would only be enough to create bits and pieces and fragments of a system. If it is going to cost \$5 billion over five years to create bits and pieces and fragments, how much is it going to cost to make universal the government day care bureaucracy?

It is not just a rhetorical question. I have with me a list of organizations, most of them government funded, that support the day care bureaucracy proposed by the minister and the Liberal government. I have visited their research studies on the cost of the program. Remember that all these organizations are supportive of a government day care bureaucracy. Let me give an example of what they have said.

I have here a document from the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada. It indicates that the full cost of a government day care bureaucracy, the kind that the Liberals are proposing, is 1% of GDP. That does not sound like a lot, but that 1% is deceptively large. We are talking about \$10 billion per year, not \$1 billion as the government claim. This means there is a \$9 billion black hole in the government's day care bureaucracy promise.

• (1535)

Where will the government get that \$9 billion? It cannot merely be pulled out of thin air. It will have to be taken from the pockets of

parents through higher taxes. A \$9 billion obligation, whether it is borne partly by the provinces and partly by the federal government, there is only one source of revenue from which that \$10 billion can come and that is out of the pockets of taxpayers. If the government claims otherwise, it has to demonstrate which other programs it is prepared to cut, health care perhaps, or whether it is willing to run a budgetary deficit.

However for the government to claim that it can bring in a universal day care bureaucracy for only \$5 billion over five years is deceptive, as has been admitted by the minister responsible who says that \$5 billion over five years "does not create a system", and who then goes on to say that it will merely create bits and pieces.

The organization I quoted gave us this document entitled, "From patchwork to framework: A child care strategy for Canada", which is the same strategy that the Liberal government is proposing. Actually the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada is very accurate because if we take the cost of the Quebec day care bureaucracy and calculate it over the size of the entire Canadian population, the cost would be in the neighbourhood of \$10 billion.

We have evidence that the Liberal Party is trying to hide \$9 billion worth of costs associated with its latest election promise. That is the Liberal hidden agenda on child care.

Now that we have addressed the enormous cost with which taxpayers will be faced by this Liberal day care bureaucracy, I would like to address an aspect of this issue that is even more troubling yet.

I have before me a quote that illustrates the very unfortunate attitude of the social development minister, the misogynistic attitude, the paternalistic attitude, the attitude that borders on sexism. I want to read this to the House. I was here when these words were stated on the floor of the House of Commons on February 15. He said:

A recent study, as was cited by the Vanier Institute of the Family, has found that most moms and dads with pre-school children would prefer that one parent stay home and take primary responsibility for raising the children. Again, that is not surprising. As parents we all feel guilty about the time we are not spending with our kids. However, if we asked the same group of people or any group of people if they would like to lose weight, 90% would say yes. If we asked them if they would like ice cream once a week and chocolate twice a day, about the same percentage would say the same. The question, as in all of these matters, is not what we would like to do, but what we will do, and what we do.

Let us review. The fact that the Vanier Institute demonstrated that the vast majority of parents prefer an at-home child care option over the day care bureaucracy could merely be explained away by feelings such as guilt and the desire of a parent to stay in the home with the child is akin to nothing more than a frivolous desire for ice cream or chocolate. That is the attitude that drives the Liberal commitment to this day care bureaucracy.

Government Orders

● (1540)

This is an outright contempt for a woman's right to choose how to raise her own children. The government would take away that choice by imposing higher taxes on families that make the sacrifice to keep a parent in the home or pursue another child care option.

We in this party pursue a more hopeful and choice driven option. We would put child care dollars right into the pockets of parents to let them decide how to raise their own children. We would work our way toward income splitting that takes away inequities that are imposed on families with a stay at home parent.

This is all in the interest of choice and economizing taxpayer dollars and I am proud to stand for these values.

Ms. Judy Wasylcia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to begin by commenting on the Conservative member's speech which I found to be an attack on all families that are trying to juggle work and family responsibilities.

The member talked about patronizing, chauvinistic and sexist attitudes. Let me point out that is the member who is suggesting that this is a woman's problem, that this is a matter of choice for women, not a matter for families, for parents with children who are trying to do the very best for their children.

Let me ask a couple of questions of the member based on two aspects of this issue, the first one being economic.

The member likes to pretend that this is a lot of money going into a deep, dark hole and tries to gloss over the fact that the proposal by the Conservatives will cost a lot more than the perhaps \$10 billion we are talking about today. If he is genuine in providing real choice for families, then he must actually acknowledge that his program will cost well over \$40 billion a year if one includes the fact that he would have to provide tax breaks of such a magnitude that day care spaces can be built and created and parents can access them at a reasonable cost.

He also must factor in the lost revenue by virtue of the fact that many women will be forced to return to the home full time when they would like to be in the workforce contributing to our society, when they have made a choice to be both good parents and good contributors in terms of our paid labour force.

Let us not forget that for every \$1 invested in child care in this country there is a \$2 return for children who are growing in nurturing, caring environments under the care of professionals who have been trained to provide absolutely safe, secure, high quality care.

Finally, let me suggest to the member that he should stay calm for a moment and try to understand this issue. I doubt very much that he has had children and I want to speak from the point of view of someone who has had two children, who has benefited from the use of quality non-profit day care in the province of Manitoba, and who could not do this job if it were not for the fact that we have such high quality day care in the province of Manitoba.

For the member to stand in the House and suggest this idiosyncratic approach, this idiotic approach that giving money to families through taxes will magically create day care centres out of

the blue that parents can access at reasonable cost, he is absolutely living in Technicolor. He ought to reassess his position and actually talk to some women, perhaps talk to women in his own caucus to get a full understanding of his approach and perhaps understand the reality of working women and working families in our society today.

● (1545)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Madam Speaker, I am saddened by the hon. member's extremely intolerant approach and the fact that she is suggesting that this is not an issue that affects women. She is suggesting that I was wrong to point out that this is a matter that is deeply concerning to women, particularly young women.

In my constituency I probably have the highest percentage of young families of any constituency in Canada. They are telling me that they do not want to pay higher taxes to afford a \$10 billion day care bureaucracy. They are telling me that they would rather have the dollars put right into their pockets.

The hon. member asked about the cost of our program. Because our program puts dollars directly in the pockets of parents, we cut out all the bureaucracy. Second, it is easily calculated because the amount that we will put directly into the pockets of parents is merely multiplied by the number of children for whom that credit is provided. We can provide these dollars without bureaucracy and we can allow parents and women to decide for themselves how those dollars are spent.

The United Nations has recognized that the system of taxation that the government has in place is discriminatory because it does not recognize the economic and social value associated with stay at home parenting. The United Nations points out that it is an offence to basic human rights that the government taxes families with single incomes at a higher rate than families with dual incomes.

We would put an end to that human rights violation. We would put child care dollars directly into parents' pockets and let women and families decide for themselves. I am proud to say that.

● (1550)

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Social Development (Social Economy), Lib.): Madam Speaker, before I proceed I want to put it on the record that what the hon. member is referring to is a \$300 tax break but he forgets that we also have a national child tax benefit that is provided to all families. The party seems to somehow forget that. In any case, I will get to that in my speech.

I also want to ask the hon. member, perhaps when he asks me a question, why the hon. member for Edmonton—Spruce Grove said that her party will honour all the agreements that we have signed with the five provinces.

I will begin my speech first by emphasizing this government's commitment to early learning and child care. We are not only talking about child care. We are talking about a national system of early learning, our commitment to seniors and our commitment to unpaid caregivers. Each has been identified as key priorities in the budget 2005.

Government Orders

We know that a healthy social and economic environment leads to healthy communities and ultimately to an improved quality of life. On this note, allow me to also outline our advances in the area of the social economy, which is my specific area of responsibility.

[*Translation*]

The social economy is made up of all entrepreneurs and non-profit corporations. These enterprises produce goods and services for the market economy, but they manage their operations with a view to redirecting their profits in pursuit of social and community goals; basically, they are reinvesting their surpluses in the community.

[*English*]

These businesses use their skills and services for social goals, whether it is protecting the environment, revitalizing neighbourhoods or helping disadvantaged groups reach their full potential.

The Government of Canada is determined to foster the social economy in all its diverse forms so that it becomes a key component of Canada's social policy tool kit. May I say that in Quebec, the province in which I was elected and in which I have spent most of my life, some of the day cares are run under the auspices of something called the social economy.

[*Translation*]

This government has made a commitment to inject \$132 million over five years in the social economy, to support financial initiatives to increase lending to social economy enterprises, reinforce the capacity of community organizations involved in economic development, support community based research on the social economy, and improve the access of social enterprises to programs and services for small and medium-sized enterprises.

Just last month I announced, together with my colleague, the hon. Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, the key measures that will be implemented in Quebec to promote the social economy and contribute to the success of the enterprises operating in Quebec. These measures will include \$5.1 million over two years for capacity building, and \$30 million over five years for the Social Economy Patient Capital Fund.

[*English*]

These measures will enable the social economy to reach its potential and they will benefit all Canadians. We must invest dollars now if we wish to secure a healthy social economy for Canada's future.

This government has always focused on the priorities that are important to all Canadians: our children, our youth, our cities and communities, and the health and well-being of all Canadians. Our record of balanced budgets proves this. The budget and its accompanying bill once again prove this. The Liberal government has always and will always put Canadians first, and it also puts a united Canada first.

[*Translation*]

I would just like to make it clear to certain members of this House in connection with this budget and the accompanying bill that it is good for Quebec, good for Canada, and good for all Canadians.

Our vision of Canada on this side of the House has always encompassed all the provinces, all the territories, all Canadians, and Quebec. We have always believed, and continue to believe, in a united Canada.

The Liberal government's record has always demonstrated our commitment to all Canadians. This budget and the accompanying bill reinforce that commitment. I see that in my own riding of Ahuntsic.

Human Resources and Skills Development has announced \$215,000 for older worker pilot projects, which includes the textile and garment workers. There has been \$275,000 from the Department of Labour for the supported communities partnership initiative, and another nearly \$100,000 for three agencies in my riding of Ahuntsic from the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

The Liberal government has made a commitment to our children, our young people, our cities and communities, and we keep our commitments. This budget and the accompanying bill respect and reinforce our commitments. They deliver the goods to all Canadians.

● (1555)

[*English*]

I am sure we will all agree that our children are this country's most precious resource and that they deserve early learning experiences that will point them toward a positive and successful future.

I assure the House once again that this government's heart is in the right place when it comes to family. We actually give real choices to families. That is why the Government of Canada made children a priority in the budget. We cannot and must not let them down.

Budget 2005 will provide \$5 billion over five years for an early learning and child care national program. The impact of this \$5 billion will vary across the country depending on the priorities identified by each province and territory.

I am very proud to say that in the province of Quebec, as always on other important issues in the country, we already have a system in place. I want to tell the hon. member who preceded me that in fact I was also a working mother. When I was elected, my children were a year and a half and three and a half years old. They had nine months with their mother, two years with their grandmother and the rest of the time in day care until they entered kindergarten and school. I have known the benefits of all three systems. I still believe that for those working mothers there is a great need in this country to have an accessible universal day care and early learning system.

[*Translation*]

We already have agreements in principle with five provinces, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Nova Scotia. Others are slated for signature with the other provinces and territories in coming weeks.

*Government Orders**[English]*

We must not confuse child tax deductions with child care, as did the hon. member who preceded me, along with other members of his party.

This government made a commitment to build a national early learning and child care system, one that will not in any way infringe on parental rights or choices. Rather, the goal of this initiative is to ensure consistency and quality in the delivery of early learning and child care.

Aboriginal children, too, will benefit from a national early learning and child care initiative. The Government of Canada already has committed \$45 million over four years in the 2003-04 budget to enhance the established federal aboriginal head start on reserve program and first nations and Inuit child care programs.

Budget 2005 will provide an additional \$100 million over four years to further enhance these programs, with an emphasis on quality early learning and child care for first nations children living on reserve.

[Translation]

Our government has not forgotten its commitment to seniors either. We want to give them an income supplement and care when these are needed. This is one of the ways the government plans to strengthen the social foundations of this country.

[English]

Budget 2005 contains a number of initiatives designed to address the needs of today's seniors and the aging population that will follow in their footsteps. To help address the immediate needs of low income seniors, the government will increase the guaranteed income supplement, the allowance and survivor's allowance by 7%.

Starting January 1, 2006, the guaranteed income supplement will increase by \$18 a month for single recipients and by \$29 a month for couples. Those rates will increase by the same amount again on January 1, 2007, putting an extra \$432 a year in the pockets of single seniors and an extra \$700 a year for couples. Over 1.6 million seniors who currently receive the GIS will benefit from this increase and up to 50,000 more seniors will qualify for partial GIS benefits.

The government also wants to help those seniors who are financially able to plan better for their future. Budget 2005 will raise the annual contribution limit for registered retirement savings plans to \$22,000 by 2010 and will increase corresponding employer sponsored registered pension plans.

Although I have more to say, my time is up, but let me note that funding for the new horizons program for seniors, which I had the pleasure of announcing in my riding with the minister responsible, will grow to \$10 million in 2006-07 and \$15 million in 2007-08 and subsequent years, bringing the annual budget to \$25 million.

I will conclude by saying there is nothing more important than the adoption of this budget. If the opposition members in fact care about children, seniors and our environment, then I encourage them to support Bill C-43.

● (1600)

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Madam Speaker, I listened attentively to my hon. colleague from Ahuntsic. I would say to her that I am very involved in social economy, and my question concerns it.

I was the chair of the social economy committee in my riding in the region of Rouyn-Noranda at the time of the Chantier Défi-Emploi. We had a social economy table to promote enterprises of this type and develop them. They are very important in regions such as ours and have made considerable advances in recent years.

However, we kept running into the problem of funds for starting up or supporting social economy enterprises. In the budget we will be opposing, there is no provision for helping establish or start up social economy enterprises, which need such funds. Reference is made to a capitalization fund. Such a fund would help provide capital for a business already up and running, needing just a little help to make it.

So, my question is as follows: why does the budget contain no provision for a start up fund for social economy enterprises?

Ms. Eleni Bakopanos: Madam Speaker, it is a good question. The hon. member might look at the announcement we made a few weeks ago. There were two parts to it: one concerns a fund and the other, pilot projects. The aim of the pilot projects is in fact to get new enterprises up and running.

Once again, congratulations go to Quebec. In social economics terms, it is in the lead. The social economy has existed there for 20 years. This is the first time the Canadian government has wanted to invest in a sector of economic development that is very important to Quebec's regional development. I am very proud we delivered that at Economic Development Canada.

I would like to know why the Bloc Québécois did not support the bill for Canada's economic development and why it is not supporting the budget, since they do have an interest in advancing the social economy?

[English]

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to talk about choices and child care. Home schooling is very popular back home in my riding of Essex, as it is in Ottawa.

Home schooling parents in Canada will be paying high taxes to build what will eventually be a \$10 billion per year Liberal child care and early learning system. What benefit will they get from this system?

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: First of all, Madam Speaker, that figure of \$10 billion is a figure that the hon. members are throwing around. We are talking about putting together a national system of early learning, and they keep forgetting the early learning part of it; it is early learning and child care.

Government Orders

As far as families are concerned, I did mention in my opening remarks that what those members are proposing is a \$300 tax break when the cost of day care is \$8,000. Second, I did underline the fact that there is a national tax benefit which benefits families with children, something that those hon. members always forget to mention whenever they are making their remarks.

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have a question for the member, who is very familiar with this program, being the parliamentary secretary to the minister. It is also, from what I understand, a good investment economically. I believe that David Dodge, the governor of the Bank of Canada, and Charles Coffey, vice-president of the Royal Bank of Canada, are on the record as saying that this is a good investment in the future of our country and our economy.

In fact, there is a return of I believe \$2 for every \$1 invested in early learning and child care, as later in life these children are successful in high school and in the workplace. Could she talk a little about that economic investment and how important it is to this country?

• (1605)

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: Madam Speaker, I agree wholeheartedly with what the hon. member has said. In fact, there are economic rewards in terms of setting up this system. I used the example of Quebec. In Quebec a lot of small enterprises are day care centres and employ teachers or other child care workers within that system. I have two children who were in that system and they benefited enormously in terms of what they learned.

As I said, and I want to underline this, we are creating a system, not what the hon. members of Her Majesty's loyal opposition are suggesting, which is just giving tax breaks. I thank the hon. member for putting that on the record too.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Madam Speaker, as I rise to speak on the budget bill I wish to congratulate Carole James, who is the leader of the B.C. New Democratic Party, for her tremendous breakthrough yesterday with over 40% of the vote in British Columbia. I would also like to congratulate the new member of the legislative assembly for New Westminster, Mr. Chuck Puchmayr and the new member of the legislative assembly for Burnaby-Edmonds, Mr. Raj Chouhan, for their clear victories in that election yesterday.

I mention my communities because the context of this budget discussion is extremely important. When we arrived on the Hill last fall, we were dealing with a series of crises that have not been addressed for over a decade. We are talking about a crisis in homelessness where there are increasing numbers of homeless across the country. In my region of the lower mainland we have tripled the number of homeless at a time when we are reaping record corporate profits.

We have an increase in child poverty. As we saw last fall, we are now looking at over 1.1 million poor children in Canada which should be a source of national shame.

When we talk about the education system, I met, when I knocked on over 6,000 doors in the election campaign last year, dozens of young people who could not go into post-secondary education because of tuition fee increases. Not being able to go into post-

secondary education is not just something that affects those families, it affects the entire community. It affects the entire nation when young people cannot go on to post-secondary studies because they are cut off. Increasingly post-secondary studies are for the wealthy.

We have also seen the environment deteriorating. There was a the Kyoto plan to decrease greenhouse gas emissions by 20%. We have actually seen an increase of 20% in greenhouse gas emissions.

That is the context in the community for the budget bill that was originally presented earlier this spring. This budget bill as we all know, presented as one of its foremost planks corporate tax cuts of \$4.6 billion. We had just gone through an election campaign and there had been promises made and commitments made as they had been in previous elections by the Liberal Party, and indeed by the Conservative Party, to address some of these issues.

One of the fundamental aspects of the bill was corporate tax cuts of \$4.6 billion and to my surprise, we saw the Conservative opposition actually supporting this kind of budget mismanagement. Some \$4.6 billion shovelled out the door to the corporate sector that is currently experiencing record profits and the Conservatives did not say a single word.

That is the context for the NDP budget amendment, Bill C-48, which now makes Bill C-43 much more responsive to what we are actually seeing in communities across the country. I understand the Conservative opposition is going to oppose this because the Leader of the Opposition actually stated a couple of weeks ago he did not want to listen to what the MPs were hearing from their ridings and the public. Indeed, he said he would disregard those comments when it came to forcing an election.

However, in reality Canadians have had over the past 10 to 12 years a deterioration in their quality of life. The original budget did not address in a meaningful way all of those substantive issues that needed to be addressed.

The NDP pushed the Liberal government and negotiated effectively with it in order to bring in budget amendments that finally dealt with those issues. There is \$1.6 billion in investment to finally start dealing with the housing crisis and the homelessness crisis that is growing, particularly in British Columbia. It was an issue in the provincial campaign and led to the substantial breakthrough that I mentioned earlier.

There is \$1.5 billion to deal with the post-secondary education crisis to finally start lowering tuition fees, so that more young people and more adults can access training, post-secondary education, and those things that should be a right of all Canadians, and also in that way contribute to our economy and communities.

• (1610)

There is \$900 million for the environment, finally providing back to cities support for rapid transit which is something extremely important if we are going to deal with the environmental crises and the environmental issues that we face.

Government Orders

At a time when we must be seeking more stability around this planet, there is \$500 million in foreign aid, so that Canada starts to meet its commitment for foreign aid to address the appalling poverty that people around the world and that children around the world are facing.

We know that today, in this 24 hour period, 29,000 children will die of starvation and disease. These are preventable deaths, but they die these horrible deaths in part because there is not sufficient foreign aid to address the grinding and horrible poverty in which they live. The NDP budget amendment, Bill C-48, that now takes Bill C-43 and makes it a better balanced budget, addresses that in talking about \$500 million in foreign aid.

What has been the response to these issues and the fact that the NDP has stood up on these issues that for so long have not been addressed? I would like to read into the record some of the comments. From the chair of the Canadian Urban Transit Association:

This move shows true leadership in making transit a focal point for sustainable urban development.

From the chair of the National Coalition on Housing and Homelessness:

Thank goodness reason prevailed. Canadians need to see real progress on social housing. We don't need another time out for an election. This revised budget should be passed.

From the president of the Canadian Council for International Cooperation:

With this deal, the NDP has pushed the Liberals closer to meeting Canada's international aid obligations.

From the Canadian Federation of Students:

The [Liberal-NDP] deal ensures that the funding will be available for provinces who are willing to take steps to make post-secondary education more accessible to low- and middle-income families.

From the Sierra Club of Canada:

There is no more time for politics on this issue. All parties must work together and for now that means passing the budget and getting action underway.

These are the kinds of comments that are being voiced in communities and main streets across Canada from coast to coast to coast. This budget now, because of the NDP amendment, finally addresses urgent needs that Canadians are facing.

[*Translation*]

The question we must ask ourselves is this. Given that the issues of education, homelessness, with numbers on the rise unfortunately, and the environment are being addressed, why do the Bloc Québécois members object to a measure that moves forward on things that Quebecers need so much? Several elements of Bill C-48 are designed to improve people's the quality of life. That is not insignificant; it is important. I know that the Bloc Québécois shares these values.

This is incomprehensible to me, given that we are trying to introduce improvements. Granted, not all needs are covered. But there are only 19 NDP members. Had there been more of us, we might have been able to do more. Nevertheless, this budget is a definite improvement that will make a difference for Quebec, with \$1 billion over two years. It will make a difference for Montreal and

for public transit, as \$20 million is earmarked for that. That is not insignificant. These are important elements.

I mentioned that, with 19 members, we had nevertheless managed to make considerable advances on issues of concern to people in the regions of Canada. We will continue to work in that fashion, to improve legislation in the House of Commons to ensure that Canadians can benefit from it.

• (1615)

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick (Prince Albert, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a distinct pleasure to speak to the comments raised by the NDP member. I come from the province of Saskatchewan and I can tell members I have some concerns with this budget bill that the NDP has arranged with the Liberals.

I know NDPers wake up in the morning along with a lot of socialist friends in the Liberal Party and ask, "How do we regulate people more? How do we interfere more and more in the day-to-day lives of Canadians? How do we tax them more? How do we get them under our thumb so they have to come, cap in hand, looking for subsidies or something?" That is the way they envision society.

In 1944 a Baptist premier was elected in Saskatchewan who said, "I'll take care of you people". A few years earlier another Baptist minister from Saskatchewan moved to Alberta. He became a premier in 1944 and he had a totally different message. His attitude was, "Let's be fair with business. Let's have fair tax policies. Let's encourage entrepreneurship, investment and things along that line".

Saskatchewan had 1,250,000 people in 1944. How many does it have today? It has 940,000 people. Alberta had 700,000 in 1944. How many does it have today? It has 3 million. Saskatchewan has the second largest out-migration of 22 year olds in this country. Where are they going? They are going to Alberta. They are doing that by choice. If we want a damning indictment of NDP policies and the effect they have on society, we have to look no further than Saskatchewan.

However, I do have a question for the member. When the champagne socialist leader got together with the leader of the Liberals and Buzz Hargrove in their five star hotel in Toronto, why did they not strike a deal to address a serious injustice in Saskatchewan and the unfair treatment of Saskatchewan in terms of equalization?

The province of Saskatchewan is simply getting, and I had better not use that language. The equalization formula is abhorrent for that province. It discourages real true economic development in that province. That province actually gets poorer by trying to develop its resources. I am ashamed that the NDP leader, in making his budget deal with this shameful outfit, did not address that issue and I would like an explanation.

Government Orders

Mr. Peter Julian: Madam Speaker, the member referred, I thought somewhat derogatorily, to a Baptist minister from Saskatchewan who recently, with Canadians from coast to coast to coast, was voted the greatest Canadian of all time, bar none. After the most extensive voting process in Canada's history, people chose Tommy Douglas as the greatest Canadian of all time.

I know, having been to Saskatchewan often, that the people of Saskatchewan are extremely proud of that heritage, and extremely proud to have founded the first medicare system that was brought in right across the country because of the efforts of Tommy Douglas. They are extremely proud of the incredible work of the administrations of the CCF and the NDP that brought a province into the modern age in the most effective way possible.

So, for that member to speak derogatorily about someone who is not only dear to the hearts of people from across Saskatchewan but indeed the greatest Canadian, as voted by Canadians, I find somewhat perplexing.

However, I do want to touch on another point. He referred to fiscal management. As the member should know, and I am sure he does not because there seems to be some difficulty with financial literacy within that caucus, there was a study done of a 20 year period, comparing Conservative, Liberal, Parti Québécois, Social Credit and NDP administrations across this country from 1981 to 2001. It would be no surprise to the member that the worst fiscal managers, from the actual fiscal period returns, were actually the Liberals. Some 85% of Liberal fiscal returns were actually in deficit. The second worst were the Conservatives, where 66% of the fiscal period returns, not the budgets, were in deficit. The best record belonged to the New Democrats, where most of the time, when we projected surpluses, we achieved them and we did them without harming people and by building provinces where every one mattered.

• (1620)

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): Let me note for hon. members that the period for questions and comments is only five minutes long. When members use three minutes for the question and comment, then we have very little time left for the answer and cannot have more than one question and comment. I want to bring that to the attention of members.

Mr. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of the budget. I have had time since this budget was presented in the House in February to really reflect on it. I have also had the opportunity to speak to many constituents in my riding of Mississauga—Brampton South. I believe that as a government we are in a position to make difference.

I want to remind members across the way and other individuals listening of how we got to the position of having surpluses and thus can invest. If I recall correctly, in the early 1990s the Liberal government inherited billions of dollars of deficit. The Prime Minister, the finance minister at the time, showed great leadership, not only in eliminating the deficit but in putting us in the position of also being able to reduce our debt. And we did reduce the debt.

In the past few months I have talked to many constituents in Mississauga—Brampton South. They have given me much positive feedback on this budget. I also have talked to municipal councillors and my provincial colleagues. All levels support this budget. Why

they do is very simple: this budget addresses their concerns. It addresses their concerns with respect to health care, cities and urban development, child care, seniors, including the seniors in my riding, the environment, which is very important, and international assistance.

I want to talk about sound fiscal management. That is the first area I want to address in my remarks today. As I indicated, there is a reason why we are in a position to spend money today. The opposition will argue that the government is spending billions of dollars. It is true that we are spending billions of dollars. The reason we are spending it is that we have saved approximately \$3 billion annually due to the fact that we reduced the debt.

We conducted an internal expenditure review and saved \$11 billion. That is billions of dollars of savings because of sound fiscal management. That has put us in a position where we can invest in our social infrastructure. Not only that, but in the budget development process and fiscal framework we have put in contingency funds to allow us the flexibility to deal with concerns such as BSE. It provides us with the cushion we need for any emergency and allows us to deliver on our promises. This budget is all about delivering on commitments.

It is a budget that speaks to the commitments we made during our campaign. It is a theme that I think resonates well among all Canadians. The first commitment we made, and the concern that many Canadians brought forth, was to health care. We invested \$41.3 billion over a 10 year span and, on top of that, \$33 billion for equalization. That is approximately \$75 billion over a 10 year period to help the provinces and municipalities. I see nothing wrong with that.

I do not have a hospital in my riding, but there is one hospital just south of it and one just north. When I knocked on doors last weekend and spoke to my constituents, they told me they were concerned about the waiting times and the state of our health care system. They truly felt that this budget was very important to investment in our health care system, to sustainable investment for a long period of time. The health care investment in this budget also addresses the Romanow report, the same report that many people across this country appreciate and which reflects the type of health care system we want to develop and maintain in this country.

The second area in this budget that really pertains to the constituents of Mississauga—Brampton South is the cities and communities agenda. Highways 401, 403, 410 and 407 are in my riding. Gridlock and infrastructure concerns are a major priority for the constituents of Mississauga—Brampton South. Many people live in that riding and travel to downtown Toronto or further west to Oakville and so forth. They want to make sure that there is sound investment in our infrastructure.

• (1625)

I want to remind the members sitting opposite me and all members in the House that the government committed \$7 billion in the GST rebate in last year's budget. That is a GST rebate of \$7 billion.

Government Orders

What did we do in this budget? We allocated \$5 billion over a five year period in gas tax transfers. Not only does that speak to the commitment we have for municipalities, but it speaks to developing the new relationship that we want to build with cities, a relationship that we consider very important.

On top of that, another issue that has been brought forth is child care for the children in my riding. There is a portion of my riding between Highways 407 and 401 and Mississauga Road. A lot of new homes have been developed in that area. When I went door knocking, I had the opportunity to meet many young couples, young individuals who both have jobs and want to raise their kids. These individuals really valued the input that we had in terms of our early learning and child care program. They felt it was paramount in their lives.

We have seen the Prime Minister travel across the country, working on and signing the child care deal with various provinces. It is something that is very important to the people in my riding of Mississauga—Brampton South. It speaks to the commitment that government makes in terms of our role in regard to families. It speaks to the concerns that have been raised by constituents in my riding.

I have about eight seniors centres in my riding. I travel to a few of them each month. I make an effort to speak to seniors and listen to what they have to say. I make an effort to listen to their concerns. Many of them said they were very happy with the \$2.7 billion investment in guaranteed income supplements. They recognize that it works out to about \$400 per person and \$700 per couple on an annual basis.

They recognize that this is not sufficient, but it is a step in the right direction. They believe it is a sound commitment. They also value the leadership of the Prime Minister when it comes to seniors' issues. I have also had the opportunity to have the minister responsible for seniors come to my riding to speak to them and listen to their concerns.

Another element in the budget that I think is very important and needs to be highlighted is the environment. On the weekend I was at a youth awards presentation in Mississauga with the mayor of Mississauga. The mayor said that Mississauga is probably one of the safest places in Canada, but she wants to make Mississauga one of the cleanest places in Canada. She wants it to be the cleanest city in Canada. That is a bold initiative and I think it is one that speaks to what is put in our budget. This is a green budget, and not only because I say it; this point has been raised by many experts across this country who have said that it is a sound investment to make sure we have clean air and clean water.

I believe that the residents of Mississauga will really value that, especially the clean fund that the mayor talked about. She said that is something that attracts her and she wants to make sure that Mississauga can make a presentation for a special project to invest in that.

I have quite a few university students in my riding. In Erindale there is a university campus. Many of the university students and college students who travel to York and so forth live in the riding of

Mississauga—Brampton South. They really have a desire to make sure that Canada continues to play a strong role in the world.

They were very much impressed by the recent Darfur announcements made by the Prime Minister. This speaks to the commitment we made in our budget of \$3.4 billion for international assistance. Not only that, we invested \$13 billion in our Canadian armed forces, which now will enable us to further our reputation as a nation of peacekeepers and to go into nations where we can make a difference.

In conclusion, I note that this is a balanced budget, a budget that is fiscally sound and socially very progressive. I know that the opposition members will stand up and say they will not support the NDP-Liberal budget. Let me remind the members opposite: \$4.6 billion over a two year period amounts to 1% of the base amount of our budget annually.

Over 1%, the opposition wants to bring down the government. Over 1%, the opposition members want Canadians to pay millions of dollars. Over 1%, they want to align themselves with the separatists. I want to remind the House that this is not the way to go.

• (1630)

This budget is very important. It is a budget that I believe reflects the type of Canada we want to build. It is a budget that many people can be proud of for generations to come. It is a budget that delivers on key commitments on health care, cities, children, seniors and the environment and makes sure that we have a better role to play in the future.

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am glad the hon. member prefaced his speech with pride for budget surpluses. I have a preface and then a quick question.

When he was the Liberal finance minister, this Liberal Prime Minister cut \$25 billion from health care. He closed offshore tax havens except for the Barbados, where he registered his ships to pay 2% tax in Canada. At the same time and in fact in the same piece of legislation, he imposed a cruel 70% tax hike on Canadian seniors collecting U.S. social security for their retirement, forcing thousands from their homes.

The question is breathtakingly simple. Is this a humane way to create budget surpluses: on the backs of senior citizens?

Mr. Navdeep Bains: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the question as I think it speaks to what I was trying to highlight. In my remarks I made it very clear that today we stand to have surpluses as the reflection of very tough decisions made by the government to eliminate a deficit of billions of dollars, \$42 billion or \$43 billion, if I recall correctly, which we inherited from the Progressive Conservative government.

I think the decisions were sound decisions. They were tough decisions. Now, because of a strong economy, political stability and the fact that we are no longer bankrupt or about to become bankrupt, we are in a position of surpluses. What are we doing with those surpluses? Yes, we are paying down the debt, but we are reinvesting that money in our seniors, our health care system and our cities.

If the member has an issue with that, I guess that is why he might choose to oppose it, but I think most Canadians support our strategy.

Government Orders

Hon. Robert Thibault (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for his reflective speech and the points he brought out. In the last question I think he brought out an interesting point, which is the question of the elimination of the deficit, the creation of a surplus and maintaining and sustaining surpluses year after year. That has permitted this government over time to reduce the national debt by some \$50 billion, giving the government some room to move, some room to manoeuvre, with less money going abroad to pay debt servicing charges, money that the government can invest in Canadians.

I think we have to recognize the work that was done in negotiations between the Liberal government and the NDP in looking at priorities. I ask the member if he would not agree that those are priorities shared by the Liberal government, which were in the platform and which were part of the Speech from the Throne, but this is advancing them forward.

A lot of investments have been made in post-secondary education, research and capacity building within post-secondary education, including research chairs and millennium chairs. There is one very important element in this, which we can afford because we are paying less debt, and it is the question of the assistance directly to students in maintaining lower tuition costs. Would the member not agree that this is important to all our communities?

•(1635)

Mr. Navdeep Bains: Madam Speaker, first I would like to acknowledge the remarks made by the member. I think he again speaks to the major theme in the budget and of this government.

As I said, these were tough decisions, which we made to eliminate the deficit and put ourselves in the position where we have surpluses. Making these investments in the areas of post-secondary education, health care and the cities is a sound thing to do. Also worth noting is that we also have a plan in place to make sure that we continue to reduce our debt, to make sure that we have a plan in place in which we reach the goal of 25% of debt to GDP ratio.

I think that again shows the balance. It speaks to our track record when it comes to balancing the books and it speaks to the Prime Minister's track record. If the opposition has an issue with that, so be it, but I think Canadians really value this and they expect this from the Liberal Party.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick (Prince Albert, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to remind the member that tax freedom day in Canada is now July 4, I think, so most Canadians work the first half of the year just to pay the government bills that the government is imposing on them. All this new extra spending, this \$22 billion plus the \$4.6 billion the government has agreed to with the NDP, is just going to lengthen out the year so that there is less change in people's pockets, less money to spend in their own community and to invest in other things in this society. It is just more government.

I have a specific question. It has been asked today and we have not received an answer yet. I am sure the member will give me an answer. A fair number of Canadians have decided that the best care for their children is for them to stay at home and take care of those kids during their younger years. Could the member tell me specifically how the NDP-Liberal alliance program will address

and provide benefits to those people who decide to stay at home and raise their kids?

Mr. Navdeep Bains: Madam Speaker, the question has two components. One had to do with taxation and the notion of taxation with respect to the government. The other had to do with the track record of the government when it comes to tax reduction.

It has been brought to my attention that the government has reduced taxes approximately 21% for individuals since it has been in power and 27% collectively for families.

With respect to child care, I can only speak for the constituents of Mississauga—Brampton South. When I knocked on doors and met with families, young couples with children, they truly valued the program that we had put in place. My job as an elected member of Parliament for Mississauga—Brampton South is to reflect the views and concerns of my constituents who do appreciate, value and want the government program when it comes to child care.

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 South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, Air-India; the hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, the Environment; the hon. member for Langley, the Environment.

Mr. Paul Forseth (New Westminster—Coquitlam, CPC): Madam Speaker, Bill C-43 is an act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on February 23, 2005. However I am critical of it because, in the usual Liberal fashion, parts of it sound good but it falls short of the goodness it could have been.

For example, right off the top, printed in the summary of the bill is the following:

Part 1 amends the Income Tax Act and the Income Tax Application Rules to

(a) increase the amount that Canadians can earn tax free...

That sounds good but when the calculation is done, the average person would benefit from that provision by about \$16 for the whole year, about the cost of taking the kids to McDonald's once. The Liberals give the kids a happy meal and in exchange they want to be kept in power and thanked for their benevolence to us all.

In this bill we are rightly concerned with the Liberal approach to this country's finances: spending without a plan; the Kyoto measures in Bill C-43; the wasteful potentials in Bill C-48, which is about the misguided and hurtful NDP; and the \$25 billion in spending announcements in the last few weeks. This irresponsible fiscal approach will hurt families, children, seniors, government workers and new Canadians.

However there are some initiatives in Bill C-43 which Conservatives support and will implement if we form the government, such as the Atlantic accord, better tax relief, gas tax money for municipalities, RRSP initiatives, increases to seniors' pensions, et cetera.

Government Orders

However this bill must be looked at in the context of the overall Liberal-NDP budget. The Liberals have mixed some policies of going in the right direction with initiatives that would prove hurtful to the well-being of Canadians.

Then along comes Bill C-48, the Liberal-NDP deal, that undermines Bill C-43. It should be apparent to all who follow these things that the government is now ruining the country's finances with runaway spending commitments without real implementation or monitoring plans. It is sad to observe that the Liberals are spending billions in an effort to buy votes.

First, they bought 19 NDP votes for \$4.5 billion. Now the Prime Minister is travelling the country trying to buy votes of sectors of Canadians by making huge promises. He then attaches a threat that the power hungry Conservatives want to take away this Liberal joy. This Liberal vote buying spree is nothing more than an attempt to distract from its ad scam, which itself is a vote buying scandal worth about \$250 million.

It has all come down to the axiom that a vote for the Liberals outside of Quebec is a vote for separation inside Quebec. Voting for the scandal ridden Liberals sends the wrong message to Quebecers who do not like corruption in their name. In view of their sense of being insulted, sadly, Quebecers are choosing the separation option. The Liberals have been creating separatists and this budget bill is part of it.

Canada could have more and better paying jobs and a much higher standard of living but Ottawa taxes too much, spends too much and winds up still owing too much.

Since 1999-2000, program spending has gone up 44%, a compound annual growth of 7.6% when the economy itself managed to grow only 31.6%. That record is a fundamental flaw in Liberal management which will come to haunt our country if continued. It is not surprising that there is so much waste in the government.

Often the government responds to problems with a knee-jerk way of throwing money at a problem. It does not know what to do but it sounds good if money is sent along the way. The Liberals confuse spending money with getting results and value.

Throwing money at the firearms registry, for example, is their way of dealing with the criminal misuse of firearms and the gunplay on our streets and it reveals the general unprofessional approach of Liberal administration.

The gun registry was to cost \$2 million. Media reports now say that the actual cost is about \$2 billion and the program does not work. One can imagine the community benefit if Alan Rock had taken my advice in the beginning when I told him, in very strong terms in a consultation meeting I had with him, that I would rather have the registry money assigned to various crime prevention and community protection measures than waste it in the registry. Time has shown that I was right and he and his many advisors were wrong, very wrong.

In Quebec, the 1995 referendum was a scare for the nation. The Liberals responded by throwing money at it but without a real plan or a system of accountability. The result was the sponsorship scandal where \$250 million were wasted, \$100 million probably illegally

funnelled to Liberal friends in the Liberal Party. It had the opposite effect of the intended purpose. In fact, it reinvigorated Quebec separation.

• (1640)

Between 2003-04 and 2004-05, the Liberals could not help themselves: program spending skyrocketed by 11.9% and per capita program spending by the federal government has reached its highest point in over a decade and is scheduled to go even higher in the future. However increases in real government spending do not equate to solving problems or getting better results.

Imagine if some of that money was left with families, in the form of lower taxes. The multiplier effect of that would bring more jobs and eventually greater tax revenue for health care and education. An administered tax dollar is an inefficient dollar for our general welfare, in comparison to the same dollar that was never taken from the taxpayer in the first place.

Of course, we need public services and it is for that reason that compassionate Conservatives are so concerned about wise fiscal management, for without care there will not be the revenue available to pay for the social programs that we want.

The NDP-Liberal finance bills have it all backwards and that is why NDP spending on services beyond the capacity of the economy puts into play a doomsday financial problem, when the predicted job losses surely will come and the welfare rolls will skyrocket. The heartless social consequences of NDP thinking and economics hurts people.

I believe it is more compassionate and wise to ensure that we have more people working than just getting by on a meagre public subsidy. A growing sound economy is the most compassionate thing a government can provide so that we are able to help those who cannot help themselves. In the long term, it is a truism that NDP socialism hurts people.

Recently, while government spending went up, according to Statistics Canada, Canadian families saw their after tax income stall in 2002 and in the fall of 2003.

Under pressure from the NDP to remove the tax relief for business, the finance minister told the House that his budget could not be "stripped away piece by piece". However, within days, without telling his minister, the Prime Minister tried to cover up his sponsorship vote buying scandal by buying the votes of the NDP.

Government Orders

The \$4.6 billion, now Bill C-48, will be allocated through order in council in 2005-06 and 2006-07 to programs for the environment, housing and post-secondary education. However the money will not flow unless there is a surplus of \$2 billion in those years, and that will not be known for 2005-06 until the books close in August, 2006. That means that the money will not flow for at least 18 months. If it ever does flow at all, it will be at the discretion of the cabinet which again has not designated a plan or even stated a purpose for the money.

What we see is a familiar pattern of vague objectives, deception even of their own NDP partners and no concrete plans.

The Liberals and the NDP are falsely giving the impression that money for the budget initiatives will flow immediately after the Thursday vote. Following regular parliamentary protocol, the bill is closer to its beginning stage and needs to go through many steps and many more months of study before the money would flow.

Last year's budget implementation bill just passed the Senate this last month, a year late.

The bottom line is that the Liberals are corrupt. They are trying to distract the vote buying scandal of the sponsorship program by buying NDP votes and now the public's votes.

In most Canadian families, both parents need to work just for one to pay the taxes. We must never forget that a dollar left in the hands of a worker, homemaker, small businessperson or entrepreneur is more beneficial to the economy than a dollar taken into the hands of a government bureaucrat or politician.

The Conservative Party wants to clean up government. It looks like the finances of the Liberals say they want to clean out government.

Consequently, from a financial administrative perspective, we need an election because the Liberals are corrupt and they are ruining the country's finances. The government has lost the moral authority to govern, has not secured the legal financial authority to govern and, by ignoring Parliament, has become illegitimate.

What Canadians have seen in the last few weeks is truly unprecedented: a government already steeped in corruption attempting to cover-up one vote buying scandal by looting the treasury regardless of the long term consequences for average Canadians.

Canada cannot afford the unholy collusion of the Liberal-NDP financial deal.

• (1645)

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have to profess a certain amount of confusion after listening to the hon. member across. The notion that the government, in a minority situation, should not work with other parties and that somehow it is a bad idea that we would reach across the aisle and try to work on our common priorities with other priorities, I would suggest to the hon. member is the very purpose of a minority government and is exactly what we are supposed to be doing.

While the Conservatives, in collusion with the separatists, work so hard to obstruct Parliament and stop business, maybe they should take an example from members on this side of the House who are

trying to work with one of the opposition parties to find common ground, to make a better country and to make this Parliament work.

Canadians overwhelmingly do not want an election. We heard the leader of the official opposition say that he would take the time in April to listen to constituents and what they had to say. Why will he not listen to Canadians? Why will he not listen to the overwhelming number of Canadians from all different political stripes, to Conservative premiers and to New Democratic premiers who say that we should pass this budget?

• (1650)

Mr. Paul Forseth: Madam Speaker, I think it is the Liberals who do not want an election. What they have done is most unseemly. They have made all kinds of unrealistic promises and then attached a threat. We have tried to respond to that in the media by saying that any signed contract that has the name of Canada behind it will be honoured by us.

We need an election. The member does not understand the concept of responsible government. He does not understand that a government must have the ongoing confidence of the House. He does not understand that when the government loses the votes that it did, it is required to put a simple straightforward confidence motion before the House immediately. The government has failed to do that. That is my point about the illegitimacy of the government.

The role of Parliament is to approve budgets. Governments may propose budgets, but Parliament as an independent entity must finally vote on the appropriation. What we intend to do here is to vote for the appropriations that are realistic. The government should have negotiated with the Conservatives, the official opposition. It should not have gone to the NDP.

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I take exception to the comments made by the member, in particular his comments that NDP plans are not good for Canadians or for the economy. I only have to point to health care which has been identified by numerous studies as one of the most competitive planks in our economic package. It was first introduced by Tommy Douglas in Saskatchewan and then by the NDP here in the House of Commons. I also want to talk about the new NASA program that we hope will take hold in Canada.

I also want to speak for a brief minute about the Conservative approach to that particular challenge in our country and to quote Gordon Cleveland Michael Krashinsky who said:

Government Orders

The Conservatives are on the horns of a dilemma here.... That's why they will recycle their \$2,000 tax deduction for all families with children (about \$600-\$800 per child for the typical family). However, no one is going to be convinced that this relatively puny tax break will make a difference.

The reality the [Conservatives] face is that paying parents to stay at home is costly — much more expensive than good quality learning and care....

Unless unacceptably large amounts of public money are devoted to paying parents, only a small number will take up the option....

To encourage many employed parents to stay at home, you would have to pay them at least the rate of maternity and parental benefits, currently 55 per cent of their regular pay, up to \$413 per week. Maternity and parental benefits, which cover the first year of a child's life, now cost about \$2.7 billion a year. Multiply that by six... [and you're up to] \$16 billion per year.

Maternity and parental benefits cover only about 60 per cent of all parents with newborns. To cover all families, it would cost about \$27 billion per year.

This is the cost of the child care program that the Conservatives are talking about. If we add that to the cost to the economy when all those parents come out of the workforce because they cannot find affordable child care, we are talking about another cost of \$83 billion per year. If we add \$83 billion and \$27 billion we are talking about some pretty significant money. That is the cost to this country of the Conservatives' child care program.

The program that the Liberals and the NDP want to introduce at 1% of GDP would max out at \$10 billion a year, which would give a return of two dollars for every dollar, \$20 billion back into the economy.

I would like the member to explain that to us and to help me understand why his program is so much better for the people of Canada than the one we are suggesting.

Mr. Paul Forseth: Madam Speaker, the gentleman is confused. Unfortunately he continues to live and breathe this socialist literature which is full of myths.

The Conservative plan needs to be carefully explained and tested at the ballot box. The socialists always come up with these hare-brained ideas but they would never dare put those individual programs to the test at the ballot box.

• (1655)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Robert Thibault (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, like all the members, I had the opportunity to spend the past several weekends, including Mother's Day, in my riding. I realized that people were concerned about the political situation in Canada. They told me over and over that the last thing they wanted was go to the polls. They feel that now is not the time for an election.

These people have hopes and dreams. Many of them support budget 2005. They believe it addresses many of their hopes and needs. Health care in Canada, including the application of the Canada Health Act, the issue of doctors, hospitals, nurses and home care, remains their number one concern. The last thing they are asking for is an election.

[*English*]

A year ago the Canadian public elected a minority government. It was a message. I do not think the public got together and decided to elect a minority government so that this or that would happen.

Everyone votes individually. But the result is that we have a minority government and our responsibility is to make it work, so there are some negotiations and some discussions.

We presented a budget. The opposition agreed very quickly that it was a good budget. We put some elements in it that opposition members can support, some that we can support, and elements that we can support jointly. We have an amendment to the budget, a second bill, after discussions with the New Democrats that looks at questions that have always been Liberal priorities, always been part of the Liberal agenda, that we said we would accomplish over five years. We advanced those issues.

At the current time people in my riding, among other things, are speaking generally about parliamentary civility, which is something that is of great concern because it casts shadows on members of all parties. When Canadian voters tell me that they do not like their children watching question period because they do not want them to emulate the behaviour, it is very serious. I hope the debate will not degrade to that. I hope civility will be maintained in the House. We have seen it this week, after what happened last week, and I think we are all much improved for that.

People in my riding of southwestern Nova Scotia have told me that they do not want an election. Like all Canadians, like all members of the House, like all members on this side, they are not happy about the sponsorship debacle. They are not happy about what they hear and about the activities that have happened. They want to make sure, as I do, that those who are responsible face the full consequences of the law, but they want to know, as I do, exactly what that happened. They want to know from Justice Gomery, from the court; they want things to follow their course. They recognize that if we watch the testimony on TV, we see people contradicting one another. We know things happened that were not right. What the public wants to know is, is this an ongoing matter? Has it been fixed? How do we ensure that this does not happen in the future, and who was responsible? There are many tracks to find that out.

I participated last year on the public accounts committee. We heard from many people. We heard from the Auditor General who told us of the years that these problems existed. That was in the past, some four or five years ago. We also heard from the internal auditors of the government who had been assigned to look at this issue. They assured us that changes had been made to take care of it.

I am comfortable. While opposition members will use the word "corrupt" about this government, they are misleading Canadians. They are knowingly doing that, but they know that no shadow has been cast on any member of the current government.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Why didn't the Prime Minister apologize to Parliament?

Hon. Robert Thibault: Madam Speaker, those members cast aspersions. They raise the Prime Minister's name. What did the Prime Minister do when he came into office? He referred this matter to the public accounts committee.

Government Orders

[Translation]

The first thing he did was ask the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to consider this information in order to fully understand what had happened. He gave the committee access to all the departmental documents so it could identify the problems and shortcomings of the current system and determine what the minister and deputy minister had been responsible for, in order to ensure those mistakes are not repeated.

• (1700)

[English]

He hired a special counsel and said, "Retrieve the money. Go back, find out if there was money that was illegally paid out, money for which there was no valid work done and retrieve it". There are now \$41 million worth of lawsuits. He appointed the Gomery commission. He cancelled the program. He testified, as did the former prime minister. He was the first prime minister to do that since Sir John A. Macdonald.

If the Prime Minister had any responsibility in it, I could not believe that he would put those things in place. It would be beyond belief that he would put those things in place. He put those things in place because he wants to get to the truth.

He supplied 12 million pages of documentation to the Gomery commission. Investments of \$60 million to \$70 million, some say \$72 million, have been made for the Gomery commission's work. There are forensic auditors, accountants and lawyers. There are teams of experts who are going through the documentation. They will see through the fog of the testimony. People, some under criminal charges, are contradicting one another in their testimony. The Gomery commission will see through that fog and will give us an answer.

My constituents are telling me, "Let us wait for that. We do not want an election now. There are no problems now. The program does not exist. It was fixed four years ago. No one in the current government is being questioned, so let us go forward".

What do they want to go forward on? The Atlantic accord is one element. Some members of the opposition will suggest that we should move the Atlantic accord aside and vote only on that. I support the Atlantic accord, but I also support ACOA, the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency. I also support parents and children and the child care proposals.

I also support the military and the defence investments. At the base in Greenwood, \$50 million in capital works is going on now. It is a strategic base. Much of that investment is of economic importance to the country and to my community, of military strategic importance. We have investment in the military on many sides. One is a linking with foreign policy, a foreign policy review, a military review, making sure that we are doing what we should be doing.

We are making sure that the military has the equipment. We have the new Cormorant helicopters doing search and rescue. Another procurement process is going on for search and rescue fixed wing aircraft. Much of the other equipment is being replaced and modernized.

There is training for the military that will be needed for the future, that will support our foreign policy, our partnerships with the United States, with NATO, with NORAD, and all the others. We have to make sure that we do that properly.

Another thing we recognize is that we need to recruit in the military. That is very difficult in this context, so we look at what the impediments are. One of them I assume is that after 20 or 25 years, when people leave the military in the prime of their lives, they may not necessarily have the right training for the workplace. They may be suffering from some illness or from disabilities that make them not as employable. What did the government do? It came out with the veterans charter. I do thank all parties for having supported that, and the other house for having moved it so quickly. The veterans charter takes care of our fighting men and women, our service people, after they leave the military. It was a responsible thing that we did.

I remember fighting the election a year ago and my opponent, a good man, was quoting from the policy manual saying that what we needed in the military was an aircraft carrier on each coast. The military never asked for that. It was not tied to any of our policies. This is what I was hearing in seven or eight debates. Then there was a correction that it was not an aircraft carrier, it was for helicopters. A 12-year-old boy corrected him, telling him that helicopters were aircraft.

In my riding they also want money for child care.

I only have a minute left and there is so much more to say. There are many aspirations: the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, money for seniors, defence, child care, so many aspirations in the community that it is important for us to get the budget through.

With the additional work we did with the NDP, the most important thing to me is helping students with their tuition costs, reducing their debt load, making sure that students go to the schools and take the courses of their choice, not based on what they can afford but based on their capacities, their dreams and their aspirations. That will continue to build a great country.

I hope all members of all parties will support the budget.

• (1705)

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since this is about the budget I have a very simple question, but I will give a quick preamble.

It has been two and a half years since the government came to Windsor and announced \$150 million for the border infrastructure fund to make improvements to the corridor and there is still no pavement between Windsor and Detroit. The third crossing will cost some \$300 million to \$400 million, and at least hundreds of millions of dollars more for pavement to link highways to the third crossing, yet there is only \$50 million left in this budget.

Government Orders

Why are there no additional dollars in Bill C-43 to solve the problem at the Windsor-Detroit border? Does the government not care about the people of Essex and Windsor?

Hon. Robert Thibault: Mr. Speaker, it has been a big priority of the government to ensure that we have safe border crossings and that we encourage trade with all countries, particularly, our neighbours to the south and largest trading partner.

Since the 9/11 terrorist act, we have invested billions of dollars in security, including some money for border crossings and improvements as well as new technology. We are leading the way internationally. We still have some challenges. We must continue to work with the provinces and cities in certain instances.

I do not know of all the complexities of Windsor, but I understand it is not unanimous in that community as to where and how, but there is debate and there are discussions with the provincial government.

I am seeing some positive activities in the Atlantic at the Holton and Callous crossings. We are making the investments necessary to continue to ensure that trade. I am sure we will be doing that across the country to ensure that we continue to foster the biggest trading partnership and relationship in the world.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask my hon. colleague one simple question.

I listened very carefully, during the preamble to his speech, when he referred to the sponsorship scandal, the Gomery commission, everything that happened, the inquiry, the Prime Minister and so on.

What is his interpretation of the announcement the hon. Minister of Transport made a few minutes ago about the creation of a trust into which \$750,000 of the alleged dirty money will be deposited, in order to—perhaps, eventually—repay the money, received inappropriately during the sponsorship scandal?

I want to know why this is being done now at the 11th hour, when we have been calling for this for more than six months now? How does he explain this?

Hon. Robert Thibault: Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has been very clear. First, he has been saying all along that any money given illegally to the Liberal Party, any money that should not have been given, will be returned.

Now, we do not know what amounts are involved. Was money involved or not? And if so, how much? All these questions remain to be answered. Public confidence must be considered, after all. We have heard the testimony. So, in good faith, we have set up a trust account. If the amount involved is \$100, the difference will come back to us. If it is \$800,000, then we will put more money into the account. We have created a trust.

I sat on the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, and we have heard many testimonies. We were told that, before our time, before these ad campaigns and this sponsorship program, a similar situation existed with certain government agencies in Quebec, a PQ government at the time, agencies such as the Société des alcools or Hydro-Québec.

It was later learned that agencies and companies which allegedly received contracts had made contributions. But the Liberal Party opened an investigation. We have the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

An hon. member: Loto-Québec was one.

Mr. Roger Thibault: Loto-Québec was another one.

We have set up the Gomery commission. We are not hiding anything. We want to get to the truth. We will make sure this never happens again and we encourage everyone to do the same.

[*English*]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are on the eve of a confidence vote that is going to take place tomorrow on the budget. This budget seems to have become one of the main issues now facing Canadians with respect to the continuation of the Liberal government. The Liberal government has been going around the country touting that if the government were to fall, there would be major and severe impacts because of the promises it made in the budget it tabled in February 2005.

Today we are speaking on Bill C-43, a budget implementation bill which followed the budget and of course tomorrow we will be speaking on Bill C-48, the other budget implementation bill. We will have votes on both Bill C-43 and Bill C-48.

As we rise in the House to speak to these main issues all we hear from the Liberal government side are all the expenditures that have been promised to everybody in the budget. Should the budget not pass and should the government fall, the Liberals say there is going to be a major impact, as if everything is going to come to a stop. They talk as if the Conservative Party does not have a plan, as if the Conservative Party members would suddenly close their eyes and not do something about faults in the Canadian economy addressed by the budget.

I have stood in the House many times in the past eight years to speak about budgets which contained many of the issues that the government is now saying it will implement. We talked about the gas tax, about royalties to the provinces, infrastructure, raising money for seniors living on fixed incomes, and tax relief for individuals and businesses.

The Conservative Party members have been standing up in the House and pinpointing all those issues. We know that the current Prime Minister, who was the finance minister for eight years, has been talking about surpluses and surpluses, and how he brought the books under control. Let me ask this question. Where do surpluses come from? Obviously, there was something wrong in the way that they were being forecast or Canadians were being taxed and were not being told the truth. They were being taxed and we did not need their money. They should have reduced taxes a long time ago and not announced surpluses over that eight year period.

Government Orders

Today, on the eve of this vote, the Prime Minister is signing and writing cheques all over the country because he says these are moneys that are needed. Obviously, the government did not address this before, and now it has become so urgent. We are talking as if the whole structure of the country will come to a stop if the government falls. No, the Conservative Party is saying that if it forms the government, it has a fiscally responsible platform that talks about where investment would be made in the Canadian economy, starting with tax breaks and infrastructure.

As a matter of fact, the leader of the Conservative Party just met with the Liberal leader of Ontario and told him that the Conservatives would honour whatever has been signed. The Canadian public should not expect that there would be no money to address many of their concerns and issues that we have talked about if the government falls.

Let us talk about infrastructure. The mayor of the city of Calgary has been writing to us for a long time about the gas tax. This was an issue in Calgary that I talked about when I ran to become a member a year ago. Many years ago we pointed out how much tax the government was taking. Why was the government not returning the tax dollars back to the cities.

• (1710)

We have been talking about this for a long time. As a matter of fact, I remember having taken part in a demonstration in Calgary to point this out. Lo and behold, today, after the Prime Minister made his deal, he says that this is the most important thing.

If the Conservative Party were talking about that deal, why would we not fulfill that deal? As our leader and finance critic have said, we know where to invest in this country. We have presented a plan on where we have to invest in this country, and that plan is a sound, responsible plan.

There are certain things with which we do not agree. The example is in Bill C-48, the deal that the Liberals made with the NDP to stop corporate tax cuts and, as the NDP likes to say, to make investment in some social areas.

We recognize there is a need for investment in social areas, but not to the extent the NDP expects. The NDP thinks that business is some kind of entity which has a bottomless pit where it can always go and grab money. We have to present a responsible economic environment and we have to see it that way.

Business is already talking about the need for tax cuts as well as for individuals. Money in the pocket of a Canadian business is better spent than money in the pocket of a government run by the Liberals, which we note from the Gomery inquiry that is going on and what the Liberals were doing with the money that they were taking from Canadian taxpayers.

The Conservative Party platform will address the issues. It is wrong for Liberal Party members to stand up and say that if they are defeated tomorrow, all these promises will stop.

The Atlantic accord was signed with the provinces and it is part of Bill C-43. We said we could support that, but it must be changed. Of course, the government did not want to change it. It wanted the whole thing. There are provisions which we cannot support. The

government knew that. We said that if it removed the Atlantic accord from the budget, to ensure that it passed, we would expedite it. We believe that the Atlantic accord was and is important for that province and that region.

However, the spin doctors on the Liberal side of course are saying that if the budget is defeated, the Atlantic accord would go. Let us put it another way. We have said that we will support the Atlantic accord. What would it take if, say, tomorrow the government goes and a Conservative government is returned after an election? It would only be 37 days. We would put the Atlantic accord before Parliament and pass it as quickly as possible, so the benefits would go to that region. We know it is an important benefit for that region.

In conclusion, the Conservative Party has a plan. The Liberals say that if they are defeated tomorrow on the budget, all of these implementations will not take place. I want to say that the Conservative Party has a plan and Canadians do not have to buy that kind of propaganda and spin doctoring from the Liberals.

• (1715)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member carefully and I want to try to address one aspect of his speech. He talked about surpluses that the government had been able to achieve, in fact eight consecutive balanced budgets with a surplus.

First, not once did the member say the word debt in his speech. I would like to explain to him, to the extent that we budget with contingencies and prudence factors, that we assume \$3 billion each year for a contingency to ensure that we do not go back into deficit, and we do not want to do that.

Second, the prudence factors are there so if there is a drop or a change in interest rates or economic growth, those also will be covered.

If everything goes as planned, there should be a budget surplus of at least \$5 billion. However, the surplus does not necessarily mean that we have been overtaxed. The surplus automatically goes to pay down debt. We have paid down almost \$50 billion worth of debt which is a savings of almost \$3 billion a year to the taxpayers of Canada. The existence of a surplus is the fact that it is paying down debt. We need to have a balanced approach to this.

That is the issue. If we are to simply say, "Let's give a tax cut to deal with the surplus", then the member does not understand that the surplus exists for one year. A tax cut exists for every year from the year it is implemented and thereafter. With 14 million taxpayers, even a \$100 change in the taxation of an individual is already \$1.4 billion. Therefore, the member should be very careful about having simple solutions to complex problems.

• (1720)

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for bringing up this issue. It is precisely that today, with a minority government, it was agreed that we needed better estimation from the finance department. The government itself agreed.

Government Orders

The Board of Internal Economy allowed us to have more money so we could get a better estimation than what the government was giving. In that estimation it was playing with the numbers. That is why we were seeing these surpluses.

If that was not the case, then why would the Board of Internal Economy give us extra money to have better forecasting done on the budget? It was the forecasting that the government was playing with which created the surpluses.

For the member to say that we do not understand, let them not play with the figures.

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is right about one thing, that this side of the House, the government, knows how to balance books. We know how to create surpluses. We know how to pay down debt.

We know when the last Conservative government was given the opportunity to govern, it knew how to run deficits and did so for eight consecutive years. When it left, it put us into debt \$42 billion each and every year.

The member said that they would agree with all the commitments plus give tax cuts. Of course we will head back into deficit again.

The hon. member said one thing that I found really ironic. He said that the Conservatives stood up for cities and communities, that they believed in cities and communities. If that is the case, why in their last platform did they say that they would scrap three of the four infrastructure programs, which are vital to cities and communities? Why did the Conservatives in their policy convention vote against giving gas tax money directly to municipalities? If you are so for municipalities, why are you against everything they care about?

The Deputy Speaker: I remind the hon. member to address his comments through the chair.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has said that the Liberal government knows how to balance budgets. I would like to correct that and say the Liberals know how to overtax Canadians, which they have been doing since they have been in government.

For him to stand up and say that we did not look at our platform, that we do not understand municipalities, I do not know at which platform he was looking. However, as I said in my speech, it was about five years ago when I demonstrated with others in Calgary, saying that the gas tax should be given to the municipalities so they could address their infrastructure.

Every Conservative member has been talking about that. I do not know where the member was when we were talking about it.

Now that they have stolen that plan, they want to make it their own plan. Look at *Hansard* and look at the former debates. You will find out that this party talked about giving infrastructure money, gas tax money, to the municipalities.

The Deputy Speaker: All comments are addressed through the Chair. I am not going to answer that question, but I know the member next time will use the riding name or some third person reference.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois expectations of this budget included some major financial impacts for Quebec. Among other things, we expected recognition of the fiscal imbalance by this government, but this has not happened. We expected improvements to employment insurance, and were told these would be in the budget. We also expected something to be done in the budget to improve the softwood lumber situation and the promised assistance to the farmers, including the floor price. Our main expectation was to see some respect for Quebec's jurisdiction over certain areas, such as child care and parental leave. As well, we expected a government announcement of 1% or the equivalent for social housing.

Unfortunately, those things are not to be found in the present budget. One day, the present government—or the next, if there is an election—will need to acknowledge the existence of the fiscal imbalance.

All of the provinces, and in Quebec in particular, all parties, including the Liberals—and goodness knows they are federalists—and the Parti Québécois agree, and here in Ottawa, three out of four parties acknowledge that there is a fiscal imbalance between the federal government and Quebec in particular, and with the other provinces as well.

Piecemeal solution of these issues is not the way to solve the fiscal imbalance, which is the approach this government has been taking in recent weeks with its injections of millions and billions of dollars. This is not the solution. An agreement between the parties, between the provincial and the federal levels, would be required to remedy the imbalance.

For those who are listening, I should point out that there is nothing complicated about the fiscal imbalance. The expenditures are in the provinces, and the money is in Ottawa. What are the key expenditures at this time? In Quebec, mainly education and health services.

At the present time the federal government is trying in every way possible to buy its way into provincial jurisdictions, with a million dollars here, a million dollars there. This is particularly the case with health. That is not what solving the fiscal imbalance is all about. What they are creating now is no longer a fiscal imbalance but a social imbalance between the needs and the means the federal level has for meeting those needs.

We expected to see measures in this budget to counter that, or at least to find a solution, if only for certain amount of time. With the right measures, the fiscal imbalance could have been resolved in a year or three or five. This was not the case.

Despite unanimous recommendations by a committee of the House on employment insurance, we still do not have an independent fund or the measures that should be implemented so that workers in Canada and Quebec can finally receive the benefits to which they are entitled.

• (1725)

We are currently experiencing a crisis without precedent in the employment insurance fund. The government has been in power since 1993 and has cleared the deficit, but it did so on the backs of workers and the unemployed. It took \$47 billion from the EI fund at the expense of workers and the unemployed. The government need not tell us there is not enough money, because there is. We expected to see an EI fund to help workers.

I think my time is running out. I imagine we will soon be called to vote. I will continue my speech later on.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1730)

[*Translation*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE

The House resumed from May 4 consideration of the motion.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:30 p.m., pursuant to order made Tuesday, May 17, 2005, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion to concur in the second report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International trade presented by the member for La Pointe-de-l'Île.

Call in the members.

• (1800)

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

(*Division No. 89*)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Allison	Ambrose
Anders	André
Asselin	Bachand
Bellavance	Benoit
Bergeron	Bezan
Bigras	Blaikie
Blais	Boire
Bonsant	Bouchard
Boulianne	Bourgeois
Breitkreuz	Broadbent
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brunelle
Cardin	Carrie
Carrier	Casey
Casson	Chatters
Chong	Christopherson
Clavet	Cleary
Comartin	Côté
Crête	Crowder
Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)	Cummins
Davies	Day
Demers	Deschamps
Desjarlais	Devolin
Duceppe	Duncan
Epp	Faille
Finley	Fitzpatrick
Fletcher	Forseth
Gagnon (Québec)	Gagnon (Saint-Maurice—Champlain)
Gagnon (Jonquière—Alma)	Gallant
Gaudet	Gauthier
Godin	Goldring

Goodyear	Gouk
Guay	Guergis
Guimond	Hanger
Harris	Harrison
Hearn	Hiebert
Hill	Hinton
Jaffer	Jean
Johnston	Julian
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kilgour
Komarnicki	Kotto
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Laframboise
Lalonde	Lapierre (Lévis—Bellechasse)
Lauzon	Lavallée
Layton	Lemay
Lessard	Lévesque
Loubier	Lunn
Lunney	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	Marceau
Mark	Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)	Masse
McDonough	Ménard (Hochelaga)
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)	Menzies
Merrifield	Miller
Mills	Moore (Fundy Royal)
Nicholson	O'Connor
Obhrai	Oda
Pallister	Paquette
Parrish	Penson
Perron	Picard (Drummond)
Plamondon	Poilievre
Poirier-Rivard	Prentice
Preston	Rajotte
Reid	Richardson
Ritz	Roy
Sauvageau	Schellenberger
Schmidt (Kelowna—Lake Country)	Siksay
Simard (Beauport—Limoulu)	Skelton
Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul)	Solberg
Sorenson	St-Hilaire
Stoffer	Telegdi
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)	Tilson
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)	Tweed
Thompson (Wild Rose)	Vellacott
Toews	Warawa
Van Loan	Watson
Vincent	Wrzesnewskyj — 158
Wasylycia-Leis	
Williams	

Routine Proceedings

NAYS

Members

Alcock
Augustine
Bains
Bélangier
Bennett
Blondin-Andrew
Bonin
Boudria
Brisson
Bulte
Cannis
Carroll
Chamberlain
Coderre
Cotler
Cuzner
DeVillers
Dion
Drouin
Easter
Eyking
Fontana
Godbout
Goodale
Guarnieri
Hubbard
Jennings
Karetak-Lindell
Khan
Lastewka

Private Members' Business

LeBlanc	Lee
Longfield	MacAulay
Macklin	Malhi
Maloney	Marleau
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)	Martin (LaSalle—Émard)
Matthews	McCallum
McGuinty	McGuire
McLellan	McTeague
Minna	Mitchell
Murphy	Myers
Neville	O'Brien
Owen	Pacetti
Paradis	Patry
Peterson	Pettigrew
Phinney	Pickard (Chatham-Kent—Essex)
Powers	Proulx
Ratansi	Redman
Regan	Robillard
Rodriguez	Rota
Saada	Savage
Savoy	Scarpaleggia
Scott	Sgro
Silva	Simard (Saint Boniface)
Simms	Smith (Pontiac)
St. Amand	St. Denis
Steckle	Szabo
Temelkovski	Thibault (West Nova)
Tonks	Torsney
Ur	Valeri
Valley	Volpe
Wappel	Wilfert
Zed— 123	

PAIRED

Members

Desrochers	Efford
Frulla	Stinson— 4

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

[*English*]

It being 6 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*Translation*]

TREATIES ACT

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ) moved that Bill C-260, an act respecting the negotiation, approval, tabling and publication of treaties be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to address Bill C-260 this evening. It concerns international treaties to be adopted.

I remind this House that this is the third time the Bloc Québécois has presented such a bill in order to democratize treaty and international relations practices.

I recall that, in 1999, my former colleague from Beauharnois—Salaberry, Daniel Turp, now a Parti Québécois MNA, presented Bill C-214, on which this bill is based to a large extent. The bill reached second reading, but, obviously, the Liberals opposed it.

In 2001, my colleague, the member for La Pointe-de-l'Île, who supports my bill, also presented a similar bill. Her bill, C-313, used the wording of Mr. Turp's bill, but added a section providing for hearings to be held in committee with respect to treaties.

Bill C-313 harmonized how treaties are considered with how the House considers bills, meaning that treaties are treated—pardon the play on words—the same way bills are. We demanded that treaties be considered in committee. Unfortunately, the bill introduced by my colleague from La Pointe-de-l'Île never reached second reading.

Bill C-260 is identical to Bill C-313. What are the objectives of this bill? First of all, there is transparency. Our aim, by introducing this bill, is to ensure that treaties are tabled in the House and published so that this process is transparent.

Second, we want to make the process more democratic, by having the House of Commons vote to approve important treaties and by introducing a process of committee consultations similar to that for approving bills.

We also want to respect provincial jurisdiction because, currently, the federal government alone signs treaties and the provinces are not consulted, as we would like. In fact, consultations with the provinces would mean that the federal government could not use its authority to negotiate international treaties to give itself a role in jurisdictions other than its own.

The free trade agreement is a perfect example. Obviously, many areas are affected by the free trade agreement. Many provincial areas of jurisdiction are also affected. Culture is one example of an area we had to defend and which, fortunately, has not yet been affected by the free trade agreement.

For example, a new free trade agreement might be negotiated in the near future, and our partners might ask us to include education, culture, universities and so forth, although these are provincial responsibilities. So the provinces must be able to have their say, oppose such inclusions and have the right to veto, if necessary.

The fourth objective, is to adapt current practices of ratifying treaties to the modern day. We are aware that there are many many treaties now that influence our lives but are negotiated in secret. These impact on our lives daily. I am referring to all of the international trade treaties, as well as to the free trade agreement. If there is one thing that really impacts on people's day to day lives, it is a free trade agreement between several countries, in this instance Canada, the U.S. and Mexico.

If that agreement were expanded, it would have a very definite impact on people's daily lives. People must be aware, and well informed, of the impact of these treaties on their lives.

I should perhaps point out that, where international treaties are concerned, democracy is totally absent. There is no complete compilation of such treaties. Governments release them when and if they see fit, and people cannot be sure they are all being disclosed. There may be secret treaties we know nothing about.

Private Members' Business

•(1805)

At present, the treaty section at the Department of Foreign Affairs does not even have a list of signed treaties that could be made available to the public and the House of Commons, to at least know what they are about.

At present, the government is not required to table treaties in the House of Commons. This, in my view, denies the elected representatives of the people an extremely important power, the power to vote on these treaties and to relay to the government the message the people want to send through their representatives.

As I said earlier, the House does not even get to approve treaties. The government can sign and ratify any treaty it wants without consulting the representatives of the people. At the very most, treaties requiring legislative changes are brought before Parliament before ratification.

In Quebec, since 2002, a vote by the National Assembly is required. This means that only when the federal government has to amend its legislation does the House of Commons get to vote. It does so, however, only on ad hoc matters. We want to correct this approach, which we feel is totally undemocratic.

Being in no way involved in the negotiation of treaties, the House of Commons cannot consult the public. That is why we would like a process similar to the one for passing bills to be used. Obviously, a parliamentary committee can consult the public and those stakeholders who are directly or indirectly concerned by how a treaty signed by the federal government could change their lives.

It is therefore not surprising to see people increasingly expressing their opposition in the streets. In fact, there is no other place for them to be heard. This has become more pronounced in the past few years at world summits like the one held in Quebec City or others throughout the world. Many demonstrations are held at such events, especially on the issue of globalization. People revolt and demonstrate, sometimes quite aggressively, precisely because they are not informed of the content of the treaties and do not know what is happening during the negotiation process.

Obviously, when you do not have the information, and especially when it is being hidden from you, it is easy to assume that the outcome will not necessarily be positive. That is what provokes many demonstrations. People are opposed to globalization, among other things, because they know very little about the content of international treaties or the consequences, since they have not been explained.

The Bloc Québécois hopes that Parliament will give the public the chance to know about the treaties and to be consulted. This would not take any power away from the government. On the contrary, in my opinion this would only enhance it. If this power is based, as it should be in a democratic system, on public opinion, on citizen involvement in the process, then this strengthens democracy and our democratic system of governing.

Allow me to summarize the situation and the bill. The government is not required to consult the provinces. Earlier I gave the example of culture. If, in the future, our U.S., Mexican or other partners wanted to include culture, for example, in an international treaty, Quebec

would be in a difficult position since the provinces are not consulted. The francophone population of Quebec, which is a francophone island in North America, could be threatened if culture were included in a treaty such as the free trade agreement.

•(1810)

We think it is absolutely vital, so long as Quebec remains a part of Canada—and I hope it will be a little longer—that we be consulted as is our right, as francophones and Quebeckers. It would be a way to protect our rights, in education, culture or any other area uniquely ours that is distinct from those of other provinces. We could talk about health care and privatization, which were issues at one point.

There is also university education. Reference has been made to the desire of certain American universities to establish campuses here. The public has to be consulted. People have to be able to object if they wish to these sorts of processes and requests from our partners.

Obviously, we want all treaties to be put before the House of Commons, approved by the House and put to civil society by a parliamentary committee before Parliament decides on important treaties.

I may have failed to mention one point. Important treaties are treaties that require the passage of federal legislation, that change government powers, that generate significant financial commitment, such as Kyoto, for example, that change a border, which could obviously happen, or that impose sanctions or the transfer of jurisdictions to international institutions.

In Europe, for example, this type of transfer occurs, given the creation of the European Economic Community, as defined. A new constitution is to be voted on, and certain powers are transferred. In my opinion, this is the best known and perhaps the most obvious example at the moment of transfers of jurisdictions to international institutions. We should therefore be entitled to vote on them. Important treaties are treaties of this kind or treaties that involve government jurisdiction or international trade.

We also want, as I mentioned—and these are the objects of the bill—any treaty to be published in the *Canada Gazette* and on the Internet site of the Department of Foreign Affairs. This is one way to democratize the process, one way to give to citizens access to the texts that are submitted, so that they can consult them. The bill also provides for a mandatory consultation process with the provinces, before negotiating a treaty the content of which comes under their jurisdictions. Earlier, I mentioned education. I cannot think of a more striking example.

Private Members' Business

Currently, in Canada, Parliament and parliamentarians only play a minimal role in the negotiation and ratification of international treaties. We keep making requests in the House of Commons, but we are constantly turned down. We also asked to vote on certain treaties, but that too was rejected. Yet, it is precisely the role of Parliament to convey the public's wishes to the government's executive branch. In reality, it is the executive branch of the federal government, namely cabinet, which controls all the stages in the treaty ratification process.

This control also applies to the content of negotiations which, as I mentioned earlier, are often secret. In fact, this secrecy is an important tool in the federal government's negotiating strategy. Nothing, or hardly anything, is made public before the parties have reached an agreement in principle on the content, or even on the wording of a treaty.

A few years ago, we got our hands on treaties that were being negotiated at the World Trade Organization, and that might have jeopardized our agricultural sector and supply management system. When farmers managed to get their hands on these documents, they literally rebelled. This was a top secret negotiation process. Of course, when people found out about it, the government had to back off.

Unfortunately, I only have one minute left and I have barely touched on this issue. However, I know that when the hon. member takes the floor later on, she will be able to say more on this topic.

•(1815)

Hon. Dan McTeague (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for having introduced this bill, despite the fact that I completely disagree with it. Although I am unable to give a factual summary of the bill in a few short seconds, it is clear that the member's efforts build on work done in the past by other members of the Bloc Québécois, in order, for one, to give the provinces powers that are clearly federal ones under the Constitution. Not only is this set out in the Constitution but it was confirmed too by the Supreme Court of Canada in the 1930s.

I want to ask the member a question. It is very important to be clear about our position on this. He is implying that international treaties arising out of international situations completely ignore the needs of the provinces. Does the member not agree that, in terms of culture, an example he used, the provinces clearly have the ability to take part in the process and work with the federal government when their jurisdiction is affected? This has been the case with regard to Canadian heritage.

That is my only question, and I think the member has a great deal to say about this. Could he point out the flaws that prevent the provinces from intervening in their own areas of jurisdiction? I do not believe there are any.

•(1820)

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: Madam Speaker, I would like to start with a little history lesson for my colleague. According to him, Canada has been responsible for international treaties since 1867, and this is in the Constitution. I regret to inform him that it was not in the 1867 Constitution. They were the responsibility of the British Crown, since we were still a dominion under the British Crown. The Statute

of Westminster in 1931 brought about the change. I would remind my colleague that this gave no power whatsoever to the provinces. Today they still have no power to intervene in treaties.

At the present time, only the federal government can sign an international treaty. It has no obligation whatsoever to consult anyone at all. Moreover, it most certainly does not consult either the House of Commons or the general public. The only treaty in the past 100 years that involved any real public consultation—and that indirectly, since it was via an election campaign—was the free trade agreement in 1988.

The Conservative Party campaigned on the free trade agreement, which it made public in layman's terms so that people could have access to it and form an opinion. That opinion was expressed as part of an election campaign. The free trade agreement could very well have been presented first, with a referendum to follow after a parliamentary committee had consulted the public. This procedure could be used for certain treaties that are challenged by one party or by the majority of the population.

My colleague must realize that the world has changed in the last 100 years. It is highly unlikely in this day and age for a treaty to remain secret long, with the technological advances now available to us. We can see what is happening internationally. People always manage one way or another to get their hands on part of what is under negotiation. Often what leads to a lack of understanding of international events is that people have incomplete information. If they were fully informed, they could make the proper decisions. Then there might be fewer problems when it came time for agreements to be signed.

Hon. Dan McTeague (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his brief historical overview. I would also like to mention two points he missed in his little account. First, it was the Chanak crisis, in 1922. Second, with respect to the Supreme Court convention, I did mention that was in the 1930s, not in 1867, the year of Confederation. I think the hon. member misheard me. I just wanted to set the record straight.

After listening to the hon. member for Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, his remarks are causing me to ask myself the following questions. Is the Canadian practice with respect to treaties really as bad as the hon. member suggests? Does it necessitate the radical overhaul he is proposing? Does our current practice prevent us from playing our role and defending the interests of Canadians on the international scene? My answer to all these questions is unequivocally no.

The current Canadian practice, through its flexibility and adaptability to change, already allows the government to respond to change in fulfilling the international policy objectives it has set for itself, while recognizing the essential role of Parliament and the provinces in implementing treaty obligations in accordance with the distribution of jurisdictions under the Constitution.

Private Members' Business

The bill affects the constitutional system in a number of ways and raises serious questions. The harmonious balance that has existed for decades would be compromised if the proposal that Parliament be entitled to approve treaties before their ratification were implemented.

It would have a significant impact on our ability to conclude treaties and to guarantee our international commitments. It would have a negative impact on Canadian foreign policy, which serves the interests of Canadians first and foremost.

As many have already noted, Bill C-260 ignores the role currently played by Parliament, a fundamental role in treaty practices. Not only is Parliament actively involved in treaty implementation, but consultations are currently taking place in committee on a number of our major treaties, before the government acts.

The provisions of Bill C-260 suggest that the roles of each of the federal and provincial governments in treaty ratification need to be clarified and that negotiated agreements providing for federal-provincial consultation on treaty negotiation and ratification are required in order to improve Canadian practice.

In my opinion, the answer to that question is no. Such consultations have been held since 1937, and the Canadian government takes them seriously. Consultations take place usually during treaty negotiations and sometimes last for years. They must take place and they do. There is no point in reinventing the wheel.

The bill before us creates nothing new in this regard, but forces a straitjacket on the Canadian government in having it consult its provincial partners.

The requirement to negotiate individual agreements with each province under the pressure of an artificial timeframe, which this bill would create, is not only useless, but the cost of it would be prohibitive and could produce unexpected results. It could, potentially, oblige us to replace an efficient system with something less flexible, creating uncertainty that does not currently exist.

The bill before us raises another major concern in constitutional terms. Its provisions would limit the government's power to conclude treaties in areas of federal jurisdiction without consultation with the provinces. Canadian constitutional law has provided for over 60 years that the power to negotiate and conclude treaties lies exclusively with the federal government. This power is essential to Canada's speaking with a single voice internationally.

Among the proposals made by the hon. member for Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia in Bill C-260, one of them mentions the royal prerogative in right of provincial governments with respect to the negotiation and conclusion of treaties in an area under the legislative authority of the provinces.

• (1825)

I have to say, in no uncertain terms, this provincial prerogative does not exist at this time.

As I already mentioned, the prerogative to negotiate and sign any international treaties belongs only to the federal executive branch.

In that sense, Bill C-260 would violate the provision in the Constitution on the allocation of jurisdictions. It bears repeating that

the power of the provinces to negotiate and conclude treaties simply does not exist.

An amendment of this scale to the constitutional order would require more than a debate in this chamber. It would involve significant and lasting changes to the Constitution.

I must say that Canada's current system for concluding treaties, thanks to its inherent flexibility and respect for our constitutional order, responds best to the interests of Canadians.

• (1830)

[English]

The most fundamental point of what the hon. member is trying to express is that somehow there arrives from the potential of international treaties being signed, being concluded, being negotiated without consultation from all our partners from coast to coast, provincial and yes, although they are not respected formally in our Constitution, municipal players and other NGOs.

It becomes clear to me that what the hon. member is proposing very much mirrors what a former colleague of his party, Mr. Turp, proposed many years ago and that is to do indirectly by this bill what they cannot do directly, which is to manifestly provide treaty powers and to give in effect greater powers to one particular province that has an obvious interest in doing more than simply engaging in international policy.

The practical implications long term would be to recognize or to have a province then move one step further and say that the Canadian government, this Parliament, is in effect giving the right of that province to exercise a particular sovereignty which it currently does not have.

It is critical for us to understand that while we want to see more participation, the fact that there is a suggestion that there is no participation by the provinces, particularly as it relates to their areas of jurisdiction, is simply wrong and it is simply a false message to give.

We know in many domains there is a provincial interest. We see premiers attending international conferences with the presence of the federal government, usually with a flag and with someone from the mission. This is not new. Some provinces have gone as far as to open up trade offices.

To suggest somehow, as the bill does, that there is provincial frustration or worse that Parliament is not consulted on matters of treaty is simply off base.

More important, it is not just the power of the executive, and we talk of this executive in the context of democracy, it is important for us to essentially understand that the power of entering into treaties and making decisions on behalf of the country rests ultimately with an accountability. That accountability is here in the House of Commons.

Private Members' Business

That is why the Minister of Foreign Affairs, when he gets up and speaks in the House of Commons, is accountable each and every day for what he does, whether it is entering into treaties or making decisions that affect the policies of the country externally. It also means that the minister understands the difference, unlike the opposition did just a few minutes ago when it suddenly said that in the case of Burma it was okay to recognize governments, not countries.

Imagine, if we start simply throwing international law up in the air and making rules on the fly, what kind of country we would be and how we would probably be considered the laughing stock of the world.

I understand what the member is trying to do. It is sugar coated. It is soft. It is talking about regional implications. However, let us not be beguiled by what the opposition, particularly the Bloc Québécois, is trying to do. It would certainly like to have those kinds of powers conferred because there is no example that it can give where the province has not been effectively consulted.

If a province is not effectively consulted, we know that it has participated in international fora and under many opportunities where it has been engaged on issues that are somewhat in the area of shared jurisdiction.

The honourable thing to do in this case, and members of Parliament must be certainly aware of this, is to stand up for a united Canada and to ensure that this power remains within the executive power and that it remains the power of the Canadian government, as recognized by the Constitution and as upheld by the Supreme Court of Canada, as is our reputation internationally, which is unblemished.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Madam Speaker, I was expecting the parliamentary secretary to conclude with praise for the spirit of the Constitution of 1931. He does not seem to understand that the bill was first introduced by Daniel Turp, whom I can name because he is no longer an MP. Then I introduced it, but it was rejected since it had already been voted on. This bill, introduced by my colleague, seeks to modernize democracy.

We all know that, in Canada, senators are appointed, not elected. There are still a number of other clear signs of a British past. Curiously, however, they have not been so lovingly maintained in Great Britain.

I want to start by saying that what my colleague referred to as the royal prerogative and its preservation by the current executive branch is not exercised in the same way in Great Britain and Canada. On the contrary, the parliaments in Great Britain, New Zealand and Australia have been empowered to adopt international treaties. The argument that this royal prerogative has been transferred to the executive branch of the Government of Canada does not hold water.

There are objections about the need to maintain flexibility. Yes, of course. However, the fundamental principle is not hard to understand. Laws regulating the conduct and actions of citizens are multiplying and are being decided by a higher power. Individuals are not told in advance and sometimes are not even told until a decision has been made. This happens over their heads, possibly despite their wishes. These rules are being adopted by governments that are

meeting more and more often, it is true. I have often witnessed these endless international meetings.

So, governments are communicating with each another. We must ensure that these governments, which are meeting frequently, cannot form a small supranational clique that determines the laws no matter what public opinion says. Governments might believe that public opinion needs to evolve. Perhaps. But they should hold debates and provide information. Otherwise, this spirit of globalization will be rejected if that globalization ignores what the public wants or fails to put the public's interests first, but instead benefits large enterprise at the public's expense, as is often the case.

This bill is not a dirty separatist trick. It is merely a proposal for bringing part of Canada's democracy up to the same level as all the industrialized countries, and some others. New countries that become sovereign are held to much higher standards than those that exist, in some respects, in Canada. No new country could be admitted if it did not elect its senators, if it had any. That is just an example.

● (1835)

Far from preserving a democratic tradition that allows Canada's international action to be effective, we feel it is an anachronism to uphold this exclusive power of the executive branch, which does not report to Parliament unless it needs legislation to implement a treaty. By the time any treaty gets here it is already ratified and Parliament is usually faced with a *fait accompli*.

Hon. members will recall what happened during the early stages of the negotiations regarding the Free Trade Area of the Americas. A rather extraordinary public mobilization was needed just to be informed of the content and to obtain, after the fact, the text of the initial negotiation. We have not heard anything about it since. Given what was planned, perhaps that is for the best. Nonetheless, if the negotiations had been conducted with respect for rights and with a view to improving conditions in developing countries in order to enhance their development and wealth, we could have been satisfied.

I will conclude by saying that Canada today is in fact less democratic than Mackenzie King's Canada. In 1926, King said that Canada's approval needed to be obtained before Her Majesty's Canadian ministers recommended ratification of a treaty or convention involving Canada.

Later on, in 1941, he said the following:

With the exception of treaties of lesser importance or in cases of extreme urgency, the Senate and the House of Commons are invited to approve treaties, conventions and formal agreements before ratification by or on behalf of Canada.

It is crystal clear that a responsible government cannot permanently commit the interest of its citizens—committed for a specific period as soon as a treaty is ratified—without their being able to express their informed opinion before ratification, through their Parliament, as to whether or not it is appropriate for the treaty to be signed in its present, or some other, form. It is completely possible, I repeat, for the efficient mechanism that exists in many other parliaments and countries to be put in place. The presence of efficiency does not mean the absence of democracy.

Private Members' Business

I would invite the members of the government—we do not know how long they will be over there, but the debate will continue in the next legislature—to reflect on the fact that this bill should be passed in order to enhance transparency and democracy.

• (1840)

[English]

Mr. Wajid Khan (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am delighted to participate in the debate on Bill C-260, an act respecting the negotiation, approval, tabling and publication of treaties.

Under our Constitution, the power to conclude treaties belongs exclusively to the executive branch of the federal government. This means that it is the federal executive that negotiates the treaties and agrees to commit Canada to international obligations.

On the other hand, the constitutional power to implement treaties is divided between the Parliament and the legislatures of the provinces and territories under the distribution of powers established by our Constitution. This division of powers has been confirmed by our highest courts for many years and ensures a healthy balance between the executive and the legislatures.

The bill raises major constitutional concerns. It would alter the careful equilibrium between federal and provincial governments in treaty matters with its proposal to recognize a provincial treaty-making power. The implication that the bill is needed to guarantee consultations with the provinces on treaties in areas of provincial jurisdiction is simply wrong. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The practice of the Government of Canada is well established. There are consultations with the provinces at every stage in development of a treaty in areas of provincial jurisdiction. This practice stems from a decision handed down by the courts in 1937 and the federal government takes these consultations very seriously.

Simply put, the federal government would not be in a position to ratify a treaty if it could not be reasonably sure that the treaty will be implemented. Thus, when Canada wants to ratify a treaty involving obligations within provincial jurisdiction, the federal executive necessarily consults the provinces.

In addition, before such treaties are ratified, the federal government requests the provinces' written confirmation that they will implement those treaties and that their legislation is in conformity with the obligations contained in those treaties.

There are numerous examples of this consultative process, including regular consultation mechanisms in some sectors and ad hoc mechanisms designed for the negotiation of specific instruments on uncommon or specialized topics of provincial or shared jurisdiction.

For example, the advisory group on private international law is composed of officials representing the provinces and the federal government. This group has been operating as a mechanism of federal-provincial-territorial consultation for some 25 years. It is a major mechanism for setting Canada's priorities in private international law, and it works well.

These priorities cover both the negotiation of new instruments and the ratification and implementation of existing ones.

There is also the extensive federal-provincial-territorial consultation process in the area of trade policy and trade negotiations, known as C-Trade. Members of C-Trade include senior officials responsible for trade policy matters in the federal, provincial and territorial governments.

Agendas are developed jointly by trade officials from these various governments and discussions include matters such as the exchange of information on the negotiation of trade agreements, including Canada's position in such negotiations and the negotiating positions of our trading partners. C-Trade dialogue, which has been ongoing for 15 years, is critical to ensuring that Canada's position reflects provincial views in areas of provincial jurisdiction and gives full recognition to matters of shared jurisdiction, as mandated by the courts.

• (1845)

A third example is the federal-provincial-territorial continuing committee of officials on human rights that has been meeting ever since we have been party to human rights treaties. As in the case of C-Trade consultations, the group meets during the negotiation of human rights treaties prior to signature to obtain provincial and territorial input in the formulation of Canadian positions. This input is crucial to the formulation of our positions in order to obtain a treaty with clauses in areas of provincial jurisdiction that the provinces and territories will want to implement.

There are numerous other examples of federal-provincial-territorial consultation mechanisms, including ongoing consultations in the environment area such as the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment and the National Air Issues Coordinating Committee, which are instrumental in developing Canadian positions on a whole range of important environmental issues.

It is not uncommon for representatives of provinces and territories to join Canadian negotiating delegations on treaties involving provincial and territorial jurisdictions. The list of examples is extensive and I will only mention a few here.

The negotiations currently underway at UNESCO on a cultural diversity instrument offer a perfect example of a major confluence of interests between Canada and the provinces. Quebec was represented by no fewer than seven members on the Canadian delegation at the second round of these talks in Paris last February.

Provincial representatives joined the Canadian delegation negotiating the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and its subsequent Kyoto protocol, which imposes stringent limits on the emission of greenhouse gases.

In the case of private international law negotiations, where provincial areas of authority are concerned, Canadian delegations always include provincial representatives, such as on the Canadian delegation to negotiate a convention on jurisdiction and recognition of judgments.

Private Members' Business

As part of the ongoing negotiations on a Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities, the Ontario minister of citizenship and immigration took part in the fifth round of negotiations in New York last January.

There are also scores of bilateral treaties between Canada and other countries dealing jointly with areas of federal and provincial jurisdiction for which the provinces and territories are invited to join the Canadian delegations.

In one example, there was extensive cooperation between the provinces and the federal government to conclude a treaty with Vietnam aimed at resuming international adoptions between our two countries. Quebec was part of the Canadian delegation that travelled to Hanoi.

Bill C-260 would alter our constitutional order in several significant ways: it recognizes a provincial power to make treaties they do not have; and it alters the balance of power between the executive which negotiates treaties and Parliament and provinces which implement them.

Our current system, with its inherent flexibility and its respect for our constitutional order, best meets the interests of Canadians. We have the treaties and the regulations in place. We have the executive which has been functioning effectively for a number of years. The highest courts in the land have proven that. There is no need to change that. I urge members across the way to abide by that within Canada.

•(1850)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stockwell Day (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Madam Speaker, first, I want to thank my hon. colleague, the member for Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia.

I support the spirit of his bill because I absolutely believe in the powers of the provinces and I respect these powers inherent in the Constitution. The same cannot always be said of the federal government, which thinks of itself as the major leagues, with the provinces being the minor leagues.

I do not believe that is the case. According to the Constitution, both levels of government are equal. Their powers are different, of course, but both levels are equal.

[*English*]

That is why I can support the spirit of what my colleague is saying.

If we had a federal government that more properly understood the sensitivities of the provinces, especially the province of Quebec, and acted on that, then my colleague might not have been provoked to bring forward this particular piece of legislation.

This is the policy of the Conservative Party should we be honoured to win what is hopefully the upcoming election. We have stated our policy very clearly. When it comes to international treaties there would be a fully consultative process in place, not just token consultation but genuine consultation, regarding the times and the moments when the rights of provinces are being affected.

Those times of consultation would include a number of things that in fact my colleague has articulated in his bill, which I believe a responsible federal government would do without having to be forced to by law. We would in fact integrate the proper use of committees of the House in a process of discussion related to international treaties.

As other opposition parties have, we have argued consistently for a far more democratic process when it comes to committees in the House of Commons. Issues would not be constantly bantered about based on partisan politics. What is good for the country and what is good for provincial rights would be the factor, and voting and discussion could be across party lines. We would activate that type of committee process. It would be genuine. It would be truly consultative.

My colleague talks about public meetings. We would absolutely look at the potential of public meetings and how we could hear from the grassroots, the citizens, in terms of how various international treaties might affect them where they live.

As a matter of fact, in the prospective legislation there is a designation as per the number of days that something would have to sit before the House if related to international treaties. The member is proposing that this be designated in law. We would not be subjected or cemented to a particular number of days. If something had to be before this Parliament for discussion, there would not be an attempt by a Conservative government to abbreviate those discussions if there were concerns from one or more provinces.

A strong country comes about when the provinces themselves are strong and when the provinces are having their rights according to the Constitution respected. We would see any number of days, whatever would be required, before Parliament itself while these various elements were being discussed.

The federal government often talks about consultation or wanting to hear from the provinces. Our policy goes farther than that. We would want the consultation with the provinces to be intensive and extensive. We would want provinces to take the initiative, do the necessary study and bring forward areas of concern related to international treaties and the impact upon them.

This is a partnership based on equality. It is not based on the federal government having the sense that it somehow has a greater constitutional weight than the provincial parliaments. We would want what is in the best interests of the provinces. If the provinces' interests are being respected and cared for, then in fact the country's interests are being respected and cared for.

I might add that we would not pursue the provinces just before potential non-confidence votes. We would be there at all times, on a daily, weekly, monthly and yearly basis, working closely with provinces, not just when our future as a government might be in peril because of losing a vote here or there or possibly gaining one in the House of Commons in facing a non-confidence vote. That kind of activity on the part of the federal government actually causes provinces to lose confidence in the House of Commons. We would see a Conservative government being genuine and being constant in its attempts to work with provinces in all areas, really, but especially as related to international treaties.

Adjournment Proceedings

● (1855)

There is some history here, which I can reflect on to show what I believe would be a responsible approach to international treaties. In the development of the North American Free Trade Agreement, the Conservative government of the day, and I will give it credit for this, recognized that there were varying jurisdictions between Canada, the United States and Mexico in terms of responsibility of governments.

For instance, in the area of labour law, in Canada that was clearly a provincial jurisdiction. The Conservative government of the day made a point of surveying the provinces before NAFTA was signed to explore what differences there might be from one province to another and what problems might evolve if the federal government were to assume responsibility for labour law.

At that time I was a provincial minister of labour. The other provincial minister who had some difficulties with what was being proposed in NAFTA was in fact the minister of labour from the province of Quebec. We worked very closely together to make sure that labour laws which were a provincial jurisdiction would be protected and respected. We worked out a proposal and took that forward to the federal government.

The federal government of the day said, “We respect that and we will have side agreements, not just in the area of labour but in the area of the regulatory regime related to the environment”. That was also a provincial jurisdiction. Thus, there is some history of past federal governments acknowledging and respecting the areas of constitutional jurisdiction that fall to the provinces. That is the approach we would take. For a country to work well, to be cohesive and to recognize that there are differences in different parts of the country, there has to be that kind of flexibility at the federal level. We need to have a federal government that respects the areas of provincial concern.

At times, concerns in the province of Quebec may be different from those in the province of British Columbia. In the province of British Columbia, I can tell members, there would be respect for the differences and the concerns related to Quebec of how an international treaty might affect it, just as I am sure the people in Quebec would respect that from time to time there would be international treaties which would have different implications in the province of British Columbia.

That is the key. It is the spirit of recognizing the intent of this type of legislation. That is why I can say we support the spirit of the legislation. When we get down to the study of this legislation itself, there may be particular technical items on which we would obviously have some differences of opinion.

I believe that if we had had a federal government in place that truly understood what it was to respect provinces, then we would not have had the provocation and we would not have had the motivation and the causes for this type of legislation to come forward.

We would have a far more cohesive, cooperative, coherent and principled approach to dealing with the provinces, recognizing them as equals in the Constitution, not as the federal government lording it over them. I look forward to listening in future debate to my colleagues on this and to advancing the concerns that are expressed in this bill.

● (1900)

[*Translation*]

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

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*English*]

AIR-INDIA

Mr. Russ Hiebert (South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to follow up on the questions I asked in question period on April 7 of this year regarding a public inquiry into the Air-India bombing. At that time I asked the government to launch a public inquiry to determine how our justice system failed to bring justice to the victims of the Air-India bombing and their families, many of whom live in my part of Canada.

I accused the Deputy Prime Minister of dithering in making this decision. She claimed she needed independent advice to determine whether such an inquiry was necessary. Yet I note that even after making such comments, it took the dithering Deputy Prime Minister over three weeks just to appoint an adviser.

The Liberals simply are not taking this issue seriously. We have heard the expression, “the Mounties always get their man”, but the fact is that when it comes to the most serious crime in a generation committed in Canada, we simply do not know if they got their man. We certainly did not get a conviction.

We owe it to the families and the victims and indeed all Canadians to find out what went wrong. The longer it takes to get the inquiry going, the less likely we are to get the answers. After all, this crime happened 20 years ago. Those who investigated this crime are dealing with fading memories and some have even passed away. Justice delayed is justice denied, and that is ever more true in this case.

An even larger question remains. Could it happen again? Are our airports and airplanes secure? Are Canadian intelligence and police services equipped and organized to deal with potential terrorist actions? If terrorists do strike, is our justice system capable of bringing about justice?

The Deputy Prime Minister is also the Minister of Public Safety. She is personally responsible for this. Yet the findings of the 2002 Senate committee examining airport security indicate that huge gaps remain in Canadian airport security.

Adjournment Proceedings

Anyone who has flown in recent years cannot help but be aware that the airport check-in security has majored in the minors, confiscating toenail clippers and the like. While such measures are visibly reassuring to some passengers that security is being taken seriously, the bigger question is: what is being done behind the scenes to screen baggage and mail and to ensure that those who have access to the tarmac and to planes are not a security risk?

A glance through the Senate's report indicates that security gaps, even at Canada's busiest airports, are more than wide enough to allow incidents similar to the Air-India bombing to occur. This situation is simply unacceptable. It has still not been taken seriously by this government and this minister.

I can say with certainty that problems of a similar magnitude exist at Canada's border crossings as well. The importance of a secure border to protect against the threat of terrorist action was made clear in recent years by the arrest of Ahmed Ressaam, the would-be bomber of the Los Angeles airport. He was caught only through the actions of an observant U.S. customs agent, although he spent years living in Canada as a petty criminal.

Again the minister has budgeted millions of dollars more for our borders, yet front line officers have yet to see any real improvement in terms of their personal security. Neither have they seen the resources needed to actually crack down on the smuggling of drugs, guns and other contraband that terrorists and other criminals might use.

Canadians demand justice for the Air-India victims and they demand that we do everything we can to prevent another terrorist attack. When can we expect to see action from the minister?

• (1905)

Hon. Roy Cullen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to address the question from the member for South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, who has suggested that the government should call a public inquiry into the Air-India Tragedy.

At the outset, I want to extend my deepest sympathies to all the family members who lost loved ones in this tragedy. What occurred on June 23, 1985, on board Air-India flight 182 was a shock to all Canadians and a great tragedy for the friends and families of the victims.

[Translation]

Our country lost some of its innocence when that attack took place, because that was the worst terrorist bombing in all of Canada's history.

[English]

Terrorism was no longer something that happened in some faraway land. It was something that occurred right here at home in Canada.

Recently the minister, along with officials from CSIS, the RCMP and Transport Canada, met in Toronto and Vancouver with family members of Air-India victims to listen to their concerns. Additionally, the government has appointed Mr. Bob Rae to continue the dialogue with family members and provide advice to the government

on whether there are questions of public interest that remain unanswered.

In response to the member's question, the government remains open to all options, but will await the recommendation from Mr. Rae on how best to address the questions of public interest from family members.

[Translation]

Important changes have taken place since 1985 in the Government of Canada with respect to the security policy.

[English]

Over \$9 billion has been invested to strengthen existing security measures since the time of the Air-India tragedy. We have seen an improved level of coordination within the Government of Canada on security related matters over the past numbers of years.

The creation of the new Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada is one example of how the government is better positioned to coordinate the efforts of security related agencies. This coordination among security agencies is absolutely essential in the fight against terrorism.

In this vein, the government has created integrated national security enforcement teams, or INSETs, which focus on national priorities involving any threats to national security. These teams are made up of representatives from law enforcement, intelligence, customs, immigration and military agencies. The mandate of these teams is to work together in order to leverage the knowledge and expertise of each individual unit. This integrated approach between intelligence and enforcement is critical as we move forward in our efforts to combat terrorism. INSETs do not represent the final solution in the fight against terrorism, but they are one example of a renewed emphasis within the government to a coordinated approach to ensuring the security of our country and our citizens.

Another key component of this coordinated approach to fighting terrorism and protecting Canadians is Canada's first comprehensive national security policy that was tabled in Parliament on April 27, 2004. The minister recently reported on the progress which has been very significant since that report was released. The government will use this report as a blueprint as we continue to explore ways to protect Canadians and Canadian values.

We have invested billions of dollars in additional security related measures and formulated a national security policy. Does that lessen the pain experienced by family members who lost loved ones in the Air-India tragedy? Absolutely not. That is why we are serious about investigating the existing issues that are outstanding according to the victims and their families. We plan to listen very carefully to Mr. Bob Rae and the advice that he brings back to the government.

• (1910)

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Madam Speaker, it is clear from that response that the Liberals just do not care about the victims and their families. Where is the justice for the families of the 300 victims? Why is the government waiting? Why is it hesitating?

Twenty years of justice delayed is justice denied. The minister dithered in appointing an adviser and she is dithering in launching an inquiry. She has dithered on airport security and on border security. She really takes after the Prime Minister in that respect.

Just because the funds have been budgeted, and the member talked about billions of dollars, does not mean that they have been spent, or even spent wisely. That is the failure of the minister and the failure of the Liberal government.

Hon. Roy Cullen: Madam Speaker, I understand fully that the families have many unanswered questions. If anyone in this House lost a loved one in a similar tragedy, we would all have the same questions and would demand answers from government.

It is important to point out that Air-India was one of the longest and most complex investigations in the history of Canada. Law enforcement and security officials have worked tirelessly in the pursuit of justice in this case. We have seen many changes in security and air aviation policies over the last number of years. For example, shortly after the Air-India tragedy, the Government of Canada introduced stringent requirements that forbade the carrying of checked baggage on international flights unless the passenger was already on board. Canada was the first International Civil Aviation Organization member to introduce passenger-baggage reconciliation on international flights, a measure which was later extended to include domestic flights.

In closing, I would say that all of us in this House have a duty to protect the security interests of all Canadians. That is what the government will continue to do.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise on behalf of the town of Laurentian Hills in my riding of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke as a follow up to the question I raised with the government on February 25 of this year.

It is important for the government to hear directly from the municipality involved. With that thought in mind, I would like to share the letter that I received from Mayor Vance Gutzman of the town of Laurentian Hills seeking my help:

Dear Member of Parliament:

I am writing this letter seeking your assistance in a matter of grave financial importance to the Town of Laurentian Hills. What it comes down to, basically, is the Town of Laurentian Hills is owed money from upper-tier levels of government for work which the town was ordered to undertake by those same levels of upper-tier government.

In the wake of the Walkerton water fiasco, municipalities across Ontario were ordered to undertake extensive, and expensive, upgrades to their water treatment systems. We were one of the municipalities that complied with the provincial directives. Many others did not comply and still have not complied. We complied, even though the lowest bidder we could find for the job came in at over two million dollars.

That's a lot of money for a small rural municipality, as you can well imagine, but we complied, based on promises that the federal and provincial governments would each contribute one-third of the funding for the project. That hasn't happened yet. That's not good enough.

The upgrades to our water treatment plant in the Village of Chalk River have been completed for some time now.

Adjournment Proceedings

We have a state of the art water treatment system, sure, but we have had to place the burden of the costs of those upgrades squarely on the shoulders of the people in that same village.

The situation is simply intolerable. Our ratepayers cannot be expected to bear the brunt of broken promises.

The Town of Laurentian Hills complied with the terms of a deal handed down by the federal and provincial governments. Sadly, those same two levels of government don't appear willing to honour the terms of that same deal.

Any assistance you can give us on this matter, as our member of Parliament, would be greatly appreciated. We complied. Now we expect others to do the same.

• (1915)

Hon. Joe Comuzzi (Minister of State (Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario), Lib.): Madam Speaker, in answer to my colleague from Renfrew, let me first state that the federal government has never insisted that anyone undertake any water treatment programs.

I think, if she would refer to the letter that the mayor of Laurentian Hills sent to her, that was an onus put on communities within Ontario to upgrade their water treatment plants. The federal government was just a compliant partner coming in with the ability to finance through the Canada-Ontario infrastructure program, COIP, which made significant strides to improve the cost of municipal infrastructure across the whole of Ontario.

We have had over 500 projects under COIP representing a federal investment of almost \$700 million. In one of the projects, as my colleague stated, we were a financial partner for \$542,000. The investment provides incremental funds to augment provincial and municipal contributions to this project.

The Government of Canada has also supported several other projects in Laurentian Hills. It is indeed unfortunate, and I sympathize with my colleague, that the town of Laurentian Hills, when it went out for the bidding process experienced increases in the tender costs for this water treatment plant.

As she and I have discussed over several months, there are several programs within COIP that may not proceed. That will leave a surplus in the COIP account. We are trying to finalize what these projects are and if they are going to proceed. If they are not going to proceed, those funds that have been committed to COIP, and hopefully for Laurentian Hills, will come back and form part of the residue of the entire program. I sympathize with the member. Hopefully soon the program can be drawn to a conclusion. I think there is \$700,000 or so. Hopefully we can make a substantial contribution.

On top of that, we do not do this exclusively on our own. There has to be an agreement between the Ontario and federal governments. I would hope that my colleague would also ask her colleagues in the provincial legislature to support this move if there are extra funds in the Canada-Ontario infrastructure program.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Madam Speaker, again I wish to thank Vance Gutzman, the mayor of Laurentian Hills, for his letter.

The federal share being requested is \$294,620. That is not a lot of money by Ottawa standards, but it is a lot of money to these people.

Adjournment Proceedings

I appreciate the cooperation that I have received from the minister on this issue. I look forward on behalf of the town of Laurentian Hills to a speedy resolution to the mayor's request.

• (1920)

Hon. Joe Comuzzi: Madam Speaker, I do not mean to say this in jest to my hon. colleague, but we talk in such huge figures around here, billions for this and billions for that. I have to say that I have always respected the amounts of money, and \$274,000 is a lot of money. I would hope that at the end of the day the federal contribution of \$274,000 through this program will be made available. We will then have to negotiate with the province of Ontario to match that, because it is a cooperative program between the federal government and the provincial government.

As my colleague knows, as I talk to her on a regular basis on this issue and try to keep her abreast of the situation, sometimes the wheels of government grind slowly. I hope that this comes to a successful conclusion.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is wonderful to represent my constituency of Langley, one of the most beautiful parts of Canada.

I want to share with the House a concern. I was hoping to ask a question of the minister, but it appears it will be the parliamentary secretary, dealing with SE2, Sumas Energy 2. It is a proposed generating plant that will be pumping tonnes of pollutants into the fragile Fraser Valley air shed. The battle opposing SE2 has been ongoing for a number of years. It went to EFSEC in the United States, and is now with NEB. It was denied at NEB and that process is being appealed by the applicant, SE2.

The history on this is it was the Conservative government that opposed it. I am disappointed that the Liberal-NDP alliance did not oppose it. It was local government that took the lead and it was the Conservative Party that went to these hearings as intervenors to speak against SE2 and the damage it would cause to the area.

I am wondering what the government is doing on this file. We arranged a meeting with an environmental expert from the Fraser Valley and with the environment minister's staff because we had not been getting any action from the previous environment minister or from the present one. I asked for a meeting with the staff and we were told that the government was going to be working on an international air quality agreement. That is important.

Why has it taken 12 years and we still do not have an international air quality agreement? Raw sewage is still being dumped into our oceans. Pollution levels are increasing. There are thousands of contaminated sites. We still do not have an international air quality plan.

We do have a Kyoto plan that deals with carbon dioxide being pumped into our air. The commitment to that plan was made eight years ago. Recently when our commitment came into effect, there was no plan so the government quickly got together a plan. That plan said that it is going to be very difficult to achieve those targets, but the government is going to collect approximately \$10 billion from Canadians.

Where is that money going to come from? That \$10 billion we are now hearing is going to be more like \$50 billion. Where is that money going to come from?

It started off that the gas prices, what we pay at the pumps, were going to be approximately \$2 a litre. Now the price is approaching \$3 and more per litre. Canadians do not want that. They want a plan that deals with the pollution levels. They no longer want raw sewage to be dumped in our oceans. They want the contaminated sites cleaned up.

When is the government finally going to do something and clean up Canada, as is its responsibility?

Hon. Jerry Pickard (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would suggest to the member opposite that the Government of Canada is very concerned about pollution and air quality. We also are concerned about all the issues surrounding our environment. There is no question that this is a critical issue, and I commend him for bringing it forward today.

The climate change plan for Canada was released in November 2002 and it was developed with stakeholders across Canada. Obviously in one year, and even in the longer term, all solutions cannot be reached and maintained. I assure the member opposite that there is a tremendous amount of work going on, not only in the energy sphere or in the auto emissions standard. We just announced a couple of weeks ago a reduction of 5.3 megatonnes of CO₂ going into the atmosphere.

When we start moving into the question of air quality, there is no question that the Fraser Valley is a important area in Canada.

The Canada-U.S. air quality agreement was signed in 1991 to address transboundary acid rain, and that has been very successful. The recent release of the biennial progress report on the agreement demonstrates that both Canada and the United States have made tremendous reductions in their emissions of SO₂, the major pollutant in acid rain, and that in some cases ecosystems have begun to recover.

However, we also know that more needs to be done to deal with transboundary smog and to obtain the reductions from the United States that are needed to continue the recovery from acid damage to our forest and lakes. In British Columbia's Fraser Valley in particular, Environment Canada is leading an initiative to address transboundary air quality with partner agencies in the Georgia Basin—Puget Sound and in the international airshed.

Furthermore, last August 17 the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency administrator and the Government of Canada endorsed a recommendation that would lead to a decision on a negotiation of a new annex to the Canada-U.S. air quality agreement to address transboundary air quality. We agreed that a future bilateral effort should address the issues identified in the shared airshed.

The government understands that the Washington State Sumas Energy 2 project is a serious concern to Fraser Valley residents. Environment Canada officials have consistently provided scientific assessment and written comments on the impact of the Sumas Energy 2 proposal. The progress of that is in Washington State right now.

All of us have to realize that we are in a court appeal over that issue and it would be inappropriate for the government to comment further at this time.

● (1925)

Mr. Mark Warawa: Madam Speaker, some would suggest what we are hearing is hot air and I do not want to go there. We need an absolute commitment from the government that it will deal with the problem.

I will make it easy for the parliamentary secretary. I will give one example. Raw sewage has been dumped into our ocean in Victoria. When we were talking to the Washington State governor, he told us if we stop the dumping of the raw sewage, they would deal with SO₂.

When will the government deal with the raw sewage, stop it from happening and then we can move on and clean up the air? When will the government do something specific? No more excuses.

Hon. Jerry Pickard: Madam Speaker, I am sure my colleague opposite well understands that raw sewage and sewage problems themselves are a cause of municipalities. We work hard to create infrastructure programs to help municipalities with the environment.

Adjournment Proceedings

Environmental projects such as sewage treatment plants and other issues are critical. However, the federal government does not control all the raw sewage in the country. We can only help fund and move that issue forward.

We have the same concerns as the member. However, we put pressure on local municipal governments as well as provincial governments to move forward on those issues and make those things happen. I, like the member, do not want to see raw sewage dumped into any waterway. No one does. We must put pressure on the right areas. The member should talk to his municipal and provincial people and get action where action is required, at the level which deals with that issue.

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), the motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been withdrawn. The House will now resolve itself into committee of the whole to study all votes under citizenship and immigration in the main estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2006. I do now leave the chair for the House to resolve itself into committee of the whole.

[For continuation of proceedings see Part B]

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CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 140 • NUMBER 101 • 1st SESSION • 38th PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, May 18, 2005
Part B

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, May 18, 2005

[Continuation of proceedings from Part A]

[English]

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

SUPPLY

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION—MAIN ESTIMATES, 2005–06

(Consideration in committee of the whole of all votes under Citizenship and Immigration in the main estimates, Mr. Chuck Strahl in the chair)

The Chair: I would like to open this session of the committee of the whole by making a short statement.

Tonight's debate is being held under Standing Order 81(4)(a), which provides for each of two sets of estimates selected by the Leader of the Opposition to be considered in committee of the whole for up to four hours and also under the terms of the motions adopted by unanimous consent earlier today.

Tonight's debate is a general one of all the votes under citizenship and immigration. The speaking rotation will be based on 15 minute slots. The first round will begin with the official opposition, followed by the government, the Bloc Québécois and the New Democratic Party. After that we will follow the usual proportional rotation.

As provided in the motion adopted earlier today, parties may use each 15 minute slot for speeches or for questions and answers by one or more of their members. In the case of speeches, members of the party to which the period is allotted may speak one after the other.

When the time is to be used for questions and answers, the Chair will expect the minister's response will reflect approximately the time taken by the question since this time will be counted in the time originally allocated to the party. Though members may speak more than once, the Chair will generally try to ensure that all members wishing to speak are heard before inviting members to speak again while respecting the proportional party rotations for speakers.

[Translation]

Members need not be in their own seats to be recognized.

I would like to remind members that, pursuant to the motion adopted earlier today, no quorum calls, dilatory motions or requests for unanimous consent shall be entertained during tonight's proceedings.

As your Chair, I will be guided by the rules of the committee of the whole and by motions adopted earlier today. However, in the interest of a full exchange, I am prepared to exercise discretion and flexibility in the application of these rules. In turn, I would call on all hon. members to also exercise discretion during this evening's debate. As I said a moment ago, this is a relatively new procedure that provides the House with an opportunity to focus on the estimates from one department and to engage in a prolonged exchange with the minister responsible.

It is important that the traditions of the House in relation to decorum be respected and that members make their remarks and pose their questions and that order is maintained throughout the evening. The Chair will expect all hon. members to focus on the subject matter of the debate, refrain from personal remarks and deal with the main estimates of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration.

I also wish to indicate that even in committee of the whole ministers and members should be referred to by their title or riding name and of course all remarks should be addressed through the Chair. I ask for everyone's cooperation in upholding all established standards of decorum, parliamentary language and behaviour.

[Translation]

At the conclusion of tonight's debate, the committee will rise, the estimates under Citizenship and Immigration will be deemed reported to the House and the House will adjourn until tomorrow.

[English]

House in committee of the whole pursuant to Standing Order 81 (4)(a), the first appointed day, consideration in committee of the whole of all votes under citizenship and immigration in the main estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2006.

• (1930)

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Chair, it will be very interesting to participate in this new procedure in the House of having an exchange about the estimates of the immigration department.

As you know, Mr. Chair, this exchange takes place in an atmosphere where we have a number of distractions. Therefore, perhaps it is a bit of an unusual situation, but I think it will be helpful to talk about the immigration department and about its estimates, spending and priorities. I look forward to the exchange this evening.

Supply

I feel a little hard done by because all the experts are on the other side of the House, but I know they are here to help all of us. We appreciate the officials being here and being ready to provide us with information as required.

We have a situation in the Department of Citizenship and Immigration and I do not know if it is unique in any other department. There have been documents which have come to light which essentially show that the department has doubled its revenue over the last number of years, but there has been no corresponding increase in the budget of the department.

In fact, the documents we have say the following. I am quoting from a document dated February 5, 2001, where an official advises, including the deputy minister at the time. It states the department:

Doubled revenue generation & commitment to fiscal framework...Exceeded revenue commitment to CRF [Consolidated Revenue Fund] of \$1.5B by \$195M since 1994, but no increase to Operating Budget ...Decreased Operating Budget by \$54M.

Since no programs were eliminated under the purview of the department and there were no cuts to the grants and contribution transfer portion of the department's operations, the document says that the only option was to cut the total personnel by 20% by eliminating face to face processing of applications, moving the call centres to a central location, closing offices abroad and cutting our CIC officers abroad by 35%. The risk management because of these cutbacks increased because of the number of interviews that were waved. This document goes on and I will not read the whole thing.

The point is that under the government's watch the department doubled its revenue from the fees taken from immigrant applications and at the same time did not receive enough budget to even keep the operation on a stable basis. The department was bringing in money but the resources were being cut back.

What has been the result of this? It has been rather sad actually. I quote from an interview given by a Liberal member from Bramalea—Gore—Malton who said December 14, 2004, "The immigration system is in the worse situation now than it has ever been". Most members of Parliament would agree with that.

We have so many concerns and complaints from members of Parliament about a system that is not working. Why? Because the Liberal government has not put the resources that are needed to make the system work. In fact, the minister himself in answer to a question before committee said that this Parliament had not put one penny into the immigration department.

Who was controlling the purse during these last years, in fact for more than a decade? It was the Liberal government. Yet the minister admitted that money had not been put back into the department. Therefore, we have a number of real hardships to the clients of the department: immigrants and applicants under the immigration department.

● (1935)

In response to some of this, we also found out something rather shocking. Some of my colleagues who are in the House now will recall that the immigration committee met in Vancouver. We had as a witness an immigration lawyer named Mr. Richard Kurland. He brought before the committee documents which showed that the

Liberal government had secretly closed down the parents and grandparents program.

Therefore, we had immigrants, newcomers to Canada and many of them Canadian citizens now, in good faith making applications to bring their parents and their grandparents to Canada. The CIC took in those applications, the application fee, the medical certificates and security checks, but the program had been shut down. The applications for parents and grandparents were not being processed.

After awhile, people who were applying to sponsor their parents and grandparents started asking what was happening. They had been waiting and waiting and it was only supposed to take a year. This was something else the department did. Instead of letting people know what had happened, it pretended that this process was going ahead the way it always had, and in fact, was publishing historic processing times on the CIC website. So people thought because the website said these would be processed within a year or 18 months, that this was happening.

Of course, as the months slipped by and 18 months became two years or more, they started to ask what was going on. When they phoned the department, they could not get an answer or any information about the files. They then started coming to members of Parliament. Members of Parliament could not get information. Then we heard that this program had in fact been shut down and that these files were not being processed. I heard it myself from three separate sources.

I put this to the minister in committee. I asked about these parents and grandparents and why they were not being processed. The minister denied that there was any slowdown or stoppage of processing these files. Then we came out with the documents from Mr. Richard Kurland to the CIC all party committee of this House demonstrating that it had been shut down and that officers in the field were aghast at this. They did not know what to tell people. The processing was half done. They did not know what they were going to say when it had shut down in the middle of the exercise, so to speak. Until it came out through the immigration lawyer, there was no admission to people who were accessing the process in good faith that this had happened. So there are a number of issues with this department that cry out to be explained.

There is the whole issue of international credentials and the recognition of those, so that people who are brought to Canada, because they have the skills and training we say that we need, can actually use those skills and training.

The Liberal government has been promising since its throne speech in 1994 that this was going to be addressed and yet there has been no progress. Again, the all party committee has just finished travelling across Canada. We heard from witnesses over and over crying their hearts out because they came to Canada to use their skills and abilities, but just could not find the way to get their credentials recognized here or a process whereby they could obtain Canadian equivalency.

Supply

This is a tremendous hardship. There are backlogs with people waiting to get applications processed in a whole number of areas. People wait two years or more just to get citizenship after they have already qualified. Sometimes, because the date is put off, these people have to get new medical records and new security checks which cost them money. This is no way to run a department.

The department admits it has doubled its revenue and yet the service has been cut back to an alarming degree and caused tremendous hardship and difficulty for honest, hardworking people who in good faith put their applications before the system.

The promises of the minister and of the department are not being kept. A few months ago we had a promise that tsunami victims would be fast-tracked into Canada. We know that there were over 1,000 applications from people in tsunami stricken areas. They were supposed to be fast-tracked and everyone was happy thinking their relatives and friends who had applications in the system would be coming to Canada in a few weeks time.

•(1940)

Here we are over six months later and I think that only 200 actually came to Canada. Yet, in the supplementary estimates the government asked for over \$4 million more to process these applications and the operations of the department. The promise of bringing these individuals to Canada on an expedited basis, where they could be safe and have shelter from the disaster and loss that they experienced, has not come to fruition. Broken promises are unacceptable to vulnerable people who are counting on the government to keep its promises.

I know members of Parliament from all parties are going to be mentioning a number of areas in this department, a nation building department, that brings newcomers to Canada and works with us to build a great nation. However, people are treated in a very shabby fashion, are not given proper information, and made promises that are not kept in a timely manner.

I want to make it very clear that there is no blame to be attached to the civil servants who work in this department. They are committed and able. I have been a member of Parliament for over 11 years and have always found them extremely good to work with, but the policy-makers on the government side make it almost impossible for them to do their job in a way that would be a credit to Canada and would give us a reputation of respect and pride in the international community. This must be addressed.

It is sad that a government that has been in office for over a decade now and has this litany of failures, mismanagement and leaving people in the lurch is not going to have any answers. If the Liberal government were to have answers and the skill to manage an important department like this, we would not be where we are today. However, we are here today and I would like to ask the minister specifically about this secret shutdown of the parents and grandparents program.

Many newcomers to Canada promise their parents and grandparents that they will bring them here and care for them in their old age. Caring for elders is something that many cultures respect and expect of each other. A promise was made and people in good faith accessed the system and yet secretly behind the scenes the

processing of these applications to sponsor the most vulnerable family members was shut down.

I would like the minister to explain that to these Canadians and newcomers who put their applications forward for their parents and grandparents. I think they are owed an explanation by the minister as to why in secret, without telling them and still taking their money, this program was shut down.

•(1945)

The Chair: Before we go to the minister, I would ask members that when they start their presentations to indicate whether they intend to make a speech or ask questions. That way I can divvy the time up more appropriately. Obviously, we cannot have a 13 minute or 14 minute answer from the minister. The minister will have a couple of minutes to respond and then we will hear his remarks following that.

The hon. Minister of Citizenship and Immigration has the floor.

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I am delighted to address some of the misperceptions that have been put on the record, and they are misperceptions. One needs to understand that the department, as the member said, is a nation building department. It provides a service that, as she advises, is absolutely crucial for maintaining relationships with the citizens of today and the citizens of tomorrow.

It would be instructive to understand that there has been a spike over the course of the last five years in applications to enter this country. That is a positive statement. It means that more people want to come here.

It is equally important to understand that in each of the last five years we have met the targets that Parliament indicated for this department. We have been well within the range of 220,000 to 240,000 over the course of the last five years each and every year.

As a result of that success, we have actually encouraged more applications to come forward. Hence the spike in the revenues that have come as a result of the application fees collected. Parliament has not indicated that it wanted to expand that range. I indicated, when I became minister four months ago, that we would look at that and we would present a new plan to Parliament. I need time to do that.

It is important to understand that we must deal with the accuracies inherent in the service that is provided by the department as reflected by the applications that accrue to come to our country, and not by idle misperceptions that are then not only exaggerated but repeated. Those misperceptions do great damage not only to the reputation of our country but, since the member brought them up, to the officials who manage this department.

While I am prepared to address the political issues that can be raised, it is important to begin to define what it is that we want to talk about. Does the member want me to continue to answer those questions, or is she prepared to actually hear what happens in the immigration department?

Supply

● (1950)

The Chair: We will resume debate with the hon. Minister of Citizenship and Immigration who will have 15 minutes to say what he will about his department.

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I am delighted to be here tonight to talk about what we do with immigration in this country.

Four months ago I gave the House an indication of a six point priority plan that I personally had for this department. I was building on the experience of my predecessors and the experience of my good colleagues who had worked diligently in committee to draw out those issues that are definable politically, desirable socially and absolutely necessary from an administrative point of view. I was drawing as well on the expertise of men and women who dedicate themselves to the public service and especially in this sector of the public service where we are determined to fashion the country that people will call their own tomorrow.

The members opposite probably will not like to hear these facts, but approximately 40% of our population comes from elsewhere. Those men, women and their children are the biggest economic driver of the country. They are those who fashion the next generation. We are in fact those who are going to hand off the legacy of today to those who would improve on it tomorrow, and our department is key to that.

Let me tell members something about the department before I go to the six point plan. Those who would malign what we do should pay attention. Every single year the department makes over 1,100,000 positive decisions. That means that we collectively make a positive decision to welcome into this country 1.1 million people, and 235,736 received permanent residency. They were landed and became part of us. About 170,000 of those every year will also apply for citizenship. In fact, 18% of all citizens were born abroad.

One only has to look at this House. Fifty-six members were born elsewhere. We are beginning to shape the country of tomorrow by very positive decisions that this department puts into effect every year, not just because of good policy but also because we take great pains to ensure that those people will find a welcoming environment here. Roughly 236,000 people landed. We include about 105,000 students on visas to study and about 66,000 of them are at the post-secondary level. That is a fabulous number.

We include as well about another 100,000 temporary workers, people who come here for a specific period of time to fill the vacuum created, for one reason or another, in our economy. We then deal with a whole host of others who come here to visit this great country and who make a decision, unhappily in my view, to go back from whence they came.

All of that is to say that the department is engaged in a series of decisions, all of them positive, 1.1 million per year in addition to the 177-some-odd thousand every year who apply for citizenship. They become shareholders in this country.

We have said that this is all good but we still have some difficulties. Some of those difficulties are associated with the fact that we have so many who ask us to embrace them and we have not had in the past the capacity to deal with that entire demand.

● (1955)

The member opposite will probably say that the processing times are much too slow and that people are not being given what they need, but I beg to differ.

In the last budget, for example, we put in \$298 million for processing and integration and an additional \$100 million for addressing the processing abroad. We have started to put money into the system so we can increase that capacity, become much more efficient and address the needs of everyone who comes into the country. We began almost immediately by addressing one of the inequities that all members, at least on this side of the House, recognize, and that is that we had a series of out of status spouses who had entered into the humanitarian and compassionate stream in order to stay here in their own loving and productive relationships.

That stream takes enormous energy, emotional and financial. It is costly on both counts but it is also time-consuming. In the end, what would happen? We would, of course, have had these people together to begin the nurturing and building of society. What did we do? Collectively we wanted to what was appropriate, which seems easy today, and ensure their applications could be processed here inland.

We will not remove those who are in a bona fide relationship, nor will we remove those who are not a security risk. However, for the protection of all Canadians, and I know this is especially significant to some members, we will not tolerate those who cannot pass a criminality or security check. However, with that put over to one side, we will bring families together and we will begin with the spouses who are in a bona fide relationship.

We did that and immediately 3,000 such applications were addressed here inland. We put in the resources to ensure that happened. Overseas we immediately gave those applicants similar priority to ensure that those spouses who had made the application abroad did not languish as a result of long inventories.

I point this out because I need to illustrate that in addition to being forward looking, we are also in the business of ensuring that the relationships that we so desire in the country are nurtured and dealt with.

We moved in very short order on another issue that related to inventories. We took a look at the 110,000 parents and grandparents who are in what we call the inventory, in the backlog. We said that these were sponsored applicants who would eventually come to this country and that we needed to give them an opportunity to join their families here in Canada today so they have the opportunity to build a society that shows there is intergenerational communication and intergenerational support and where we would be able to sustain the kinds of loving support environments that are required by people who transplant themselves to this places far away from this place, which is familiar to us but in many respects unfamiliar to others.

There were 110,000 to be handled in two ways. I want to give the House an indication of the flexibility and the desire of the department, and dare I say the government and members of the Liberal caucus, to move. First, it was by increasing the number of parents and grandparents who we would land. Over the course of the next two years that number would go from 12,000 to 36,000.

Second, we said that we would give those parents and grandparents multiple entry visas provided, of course, they came with the appropriate health insurance, as befits anyone who comes here as a tourist.

That gives people an opportunity to move back and forth. We hope they would want to stay here but maybe they would not. We do not encourage that decision but we would give them an opportunity to have continuity in the family.

● (2000)

Just by those two measures the House would acknowledge that not only would we be forward looking, we would actually do what we had already committed to do. Is that just idle language? No, because the people opposite immediately started a telephone campaign saying that these are unproductive people. That is not so.

What we did is we put money, resources to ensure that it took place, \$70 million in additional resources to process those new applicants and to put in place the personnel required to ensure those multiple entry visas would come forward.

These are all budgetary items. These are issues that we said we needed to fund so that our language, our policy, our ideas and our philosophy would be supported by the Parliament of Canada, the House of Commons, which would say that we should take money out of our pocket and put our money where our mouth is.

I know members do not like me doing that but that is essentially what the House of Commons does. It raises moneys in order to accomplish a particular objective. Is there a more noble objective than one which says that we reunite legitimate spouses and that we reunite families, that we bring parents and grandparents together with their children and grandchildren so that we have that continuity, that stability that is engaged in what we call society building and cultural stimulus?

Those are examples of some of the things that we already do and yet they would say that we are not doing those things.

I indicated a moment ago that the other thing we do is address the issue of citizenship and we did: \$68 million to accelerate the process of application and processing by bringing in the appropriate equipment, machinery and personnel required to ensure that the appropriate testing, preparation and delivery of a most valuable document, citizenship, would come to all of those who apply.

The hear member opposite saying, "Promises, promises". No. Here is the money. It is right here now.

Canadians everywhere are asking if it is just an idea and if the money is there. The money is there, \$68 million, \$70 million. The decision is made. We put it in the budget. That means the minister and his deputies have to go into the bureaucracy, into cabinet and they have to ensure the arguments carry the day and they achieve the

Supply

resources necessary to implement the policy that these men and women get elected to put into place.

Those are not promises. That is action. Those are not idle examples of rhetoric. They are material examples of a government that works, a department that implements sound policy and it is an indication that some of that idle discussion, almost allegation and accusation, that says that the department has not been working is in fact a misrepresentation. There are 1.1 million positive decisions every single year; 236,000 landed last year; 110,000 parents and grandparents removed from the inventory via increased opportunity to land and by multiple entry visas to give them an opportunity to have a flavour and a taste of this country, the one that we take for granted because we live it every day, but it is really a dream and an ambition for every man and woman around the world.

● (2005)

I have said that I have a six point plan that members wanted so much to hear about. I have only touched on those two points. I am sure that all of those people who have taken time out of their evening to see how the House of Commons works want to know what the other four are and how they are implemented.

I am sure, Mr. Chair, that you will accord them and all of these colleagues an opportunity to hear them.

The Chair: I thank the minister. I am sure those other points will come out during the evening.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Mr. Chair, it is a pleasure for me to speak, this evening, on the main estimates of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration. Obviously, I will limit my remarks to the federal government's responsibilities, since Quebec is responsible for the integration of immigrants in Quebec. So, I will talk about the process for newcomers to this country.

I am pleased that the minister has made it a priority to see that his department corrects its numerous past mistakes. I hope that he will recognize the difficulties in addressing Quebec's priorities.

He has issued a great many announcements on nearly every aspect of immigration. We expect that citizenship will be next.

The Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration has been promised a new bill on numerous occasions. We are still waiting impatiently.

We object to the fact that, in the past few months, this has seemed like a series of election announcements, just before a potential election, and we are asking the minister to promise one thing in particular. Instead of stubbornly insisting on interfering in Quebec's jurisdiction, will the minister make the commitment that the money for the integration of new immigrants, funds set out in the Canada-Quebec accord, will be provided directly to the Quebec government, in accordance with budgets appropriated and the number of immigrants selected by Quebec?

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Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, the federal government always cooperates with the provinces with the aim of creating new citizens who want to settle here, to be productive, and to help this country grow and thrive. We continue to work in this collaborative manner.

The hon. member across the way is well aware of our agreement with Quebec. All funds allocated to Quebec will therefore be spent in Quebec. As a result, these new citizens, as Canadians, will also have the opportunity to experience life in the province of Quebec, its culture and its customs.

We have no intention whatsoever of breaking that agreement, or deviating from it. If this department has made some announcements recently, it is because they were required by the situation at the time. There is always a right time for making positive announcements.

Reference has been made to the fact that we are leading up to an election, but I think that colleagues on both sides of this House have no idea when the next election will be. We are doing everything necessary to achieve the desired results as far as the services I have referred to are concerned. It is a matter of always making immigration and citizenship possible for those who come under the department's jurisdiction, and who aspire to become part of this country, Canada.

[*English*]

The Chair: I will remind everyone that we will use approximately the same amount of time for the answer as was used for the question. I would urge the minister to have perhaps a quicker response next time or a response using the same amount of time that the question did.

• (2010)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faille: Mr. Chair, I am pleased to hear the minister say that Quebec will receive its fair share.

Does the minister intend transferring sums to the Government of Quebec to allow it to transfer and allocate funds to agencies responsible for Quebec's development?

I also have a question to help speed things up. I have a few suggestions, in fact.

Is it the minister's intention to settle the matter of live-in caregivers, severely criticized by the department of his colleague responsible for the status of women?

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, it is the same question. The funds already announced for Quebec will help the Government of Quebec achieve all of the objectives set by our agreement. It indicates that a system of integration is required for those arriving in Canada, arriving first in Quebec, to ensure they remain in Quebec and become Canadians residing in Quebec.

For next year, we have already announced \$181.6 million. This is a good amount, which testifies to our seriousness with respect to integrating those who wish to live in Quebec.

Ms. Meili Faille: Mr. Chair, I will put the question again. Is it the minister's intention to settle the matter of live-in caregivers, severely criticized by the department of his colleague responsible for the status of women?

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, in five seconds, I will say that we are doing everything we can to carry out government programs.

Ms. Meili Faille: Mr. Chair, will the minister support immigrants where they are and provide access to officials nearby, providing them with administrative services even in the regions?

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, I have already said that the Government of Canada in cooperation with the provinces—in this case, the Government of Quebec—is trying to create these programs. Why say no?

Ms. Meili Faille: Mr. Chair, I will help the minister. I will ask him the same question, but limit it to the province of Quebec and its regions.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, we are in the process of implementing a new program that could be called services Canada. This program will help provide Canadians all the services they want and need from their government. That is precisely what we are doing in some provinces, in cooperation with the provincial government. In other provinces, we still work in cooperation with the provincial government, but the cost is absorbed by the federal government. Why? As the hon. member opposite knows, the Canadian government wants to provide services that satisfy the ambitions of Canadians throughout this beautiful country of ours.

Ms. Meili Faille: Mr. Chair, a number of people have no legal status, as they come from countries under a moratorium. Under international conventions that Canada signed, these people cannot return to their home countries because of the terrible situations there.

However, Canada turns a deaf ear to those situations. It tolerates having these people here, but does not resolve their situation. Some have been here for over 10 years. Does the minister intend to resolve their situation, do more than make vague promises, and find a lasting solution for these humanitarian cases?

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, you have to allow me to speak much longer because this is one of my favourite themes. It is one of the six I listed a few months ago. We have already announced two. The third concerns undocumented workers, those whose status has not yet been regularized.

I indicated my intention to regularize these workers who are here and who are working hard for this country and for themselves, to create a society that is more open than the ones they left.

The necessary cooperative effort involving government departments, the provinces, unions, employers and non-governmental organizations has been undertaken to develop a program to address these requirements. The hon. member is starting to recognize the need for it. Fair measures have to be taken within the government. We are in the process of doing all that.

Supply

• (2015)

Ms. Meili Faille: Mr. Chair, I would like the minister to clarify one small thing. Does the program he is announcing cover all categories, that is, workers without status because of the system, circumstances or treaties, essentially those under a moratorium, or does it cover more generally any worker without status, including those who are here illegally?

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, I have not announced anything yet. I am only talking about a debate, discussions to put a program in place, so that the government and my hon. colleagues here, who have worked very hard, can consider implementing such a program.

[*English*]

It is a program that we have begun to put in place with the cooperation and collaboration of departments, governments, unions and—

An hon. member: NGOs.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Yes, NGOs and businesses themselves. We have put all of those things together to arrive at something that includes something identifiable, definable and easily manageable, something that we could follow up on and evaluate. Once I have all those factors together and we get the resources in place in order to address them, then I would be prepared to make an announcement.

If the member is asking for a short answer, then we would say that we would start with a global address to the problem, try to identify that which is realizable and solvable immediately, and build from there.

[*Translation*]

We have to take the measures necessary to do everything that is realizable for now. For the short, medium and long term, we have other plans. But there is a framework within which we are starting to work, together with all those who will be directly or indirectly affected.

Ms. Meili Faille: Mr. Chair, I would now like to address the IRB, the Immigration and Refugee Board. We can see that the budget for the coming year is approximately \$10 million lower. I would like the minister to explain where such a reduction in need comes from?

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, these are technologically advanced times we live in. Improving service provides us with opportunities for savings. The government has put in place a program to allocate funds to certain priorities, which can be redistributed.

[*English*]

We have done that and we are doing that. On occasion, we find an opportunity to use moneys elsewhere.

• (2020)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faille: I have one last question for the minister, Mr. Chair. No funding has been made available to implement the refugee appeal division. This appeal function was to be implemented upon the legislation coming into force, in June 2002. At the same time, the minister suspended the refugee appeal division. In fact, Canada was

criticized for that by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, with respect to the equity of this system.

The minister later promised to restore it to ensure that asylum seekers have access to a right of appeal consistent with Canada's international obligations with respect to refugee protection. Since it is often a matter of life and death, it is essential that the government take action as soon as possible on this issue by going ahead and setting up the refugee appeal division.

I would like the minister to tell me why the government has once again missed a great opportunity to basically respect its own legislation, passed by the House of Commons, which is needed so much to ensure fair and equitable treatment for refugee claimants.

With the surpluses the federal government is raking in, it is a disgrace that it is not able to commit the modest funding required for the establishment and operation of the appeal division, namely \$2 million in establishment costs and \$8 million in annual operating costs.

I ask that the minister justify the element of arbitrariness in the system, which is being magnified by the government's inaction and the piecemeal approach taken to implementing the new legislation.

The federal government has been stubbornly postponing for three years the establishment of the refugee appeal division, when the legislation calls for it.

The Deputy Speaker: On Questions and comments, The hon. Minister of Citizenship and Immigration.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, it is not just a matter of money or funding. It is a matter of making a rapid, efficient, fair and final decision. In order to do so, we must consider the fact that we have already implemented measures in Canada to achieve those results. We implemented a system in which individuals with certain skills act as members.

[*English*]

I am sorry that my French is a little slow and I have to grasp at those words.

We are putting individuals in place who go through a merit based analysis. In addition to that we have put in place a system that has decreased the number of applicants because we have a safe third country agreement. Because of the systems already in place, we have been able to reduce the backlog on refugees from over 50,000 to a much more manageable 26,000 merely last year. The pressures for this refugee appeal division are that much diminished.

The committee asked me to consider and to return in six months, at the end of June, with alternatives if I would not implement this appeal division. We can talk about this some more, but the fact of the matter is that June is not here yet.

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Chair, I want to thank the minister and his officials for being here this evening.

In the relaxed seating that we have in committee of the whole it is interesting to be sitting on the government front bench. I want the government to know that I aspire to this position and the NDP will achieve it through an electoral victory in this country, not by other means. Some day I hope to be sitting here.

Supply

I want to continue on the line of questioning that my colleague from Vaudreuil-Soulanges started with regard to the refugee appeal division. She mentioned that this is not a significant government expenditure. The former minister and I believe the current minister corroborated for us that it would take \$2 million a year to operate the refugee appeal division and \$8 million to set it up initially. This was a measure that was proposed by the government. It was part of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act that was passed by Parliament in 2002, and yet the government and the minister and his department refuse to implement it.

I would like to know what the minister's relationship is with legislation that was proposed by the government and which was debated and passed in this House. Why does he refuse to move on that legislation that went through the process here?

• (2025)

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, it is an interesting question, because the relationship we have with all legislation is that we think that legislation is supposed to serve the best interests of Canada. At the time the legislation was passed by Parliament—and it did not happen yesterday; it happened, as the hon. member said, two years ago—the question was, can we bring greater efficiency? Can we reduce the backlog? Can we deal with the refugee issues, with the refugee questions in the fashion that would accelerate the process? One of the first circumstances that people were contemplating was how can we diminish this?

We put our minds to it and said that if this was one of the things that we were going to do, we would take a look at it. Is it a just system in that if someone makes an application, has it considered and perhaps it is turned down, does that person have an opportunity to appeal? Yes, to the Federal Court. If the decision is negative again, they can have a pre-removal risk assessment. They can appeal that too. Through all the course of it, they can put forward a humanitarian compassionate application. All of this indicates there is protection for those who want to make an application.

The other part of the issue is, are we doing the right thing with this for all Canadians? We said that we should ensure that we have resources in place, first of all, to process the applications in a timely fashion. By the way, this is the fourth of one of my priorities and the member knows this well. Let us do this in a timely fashion. Let us be proactive. Let us take a look at some of the causes.

One of the things we did in the interim, as the member knows, is we signed a safe third country agreement with the United States. It did not make sense to a lot of people that 55% of all the refugee claimants would come through the United States. The United States is not one of the refugee producing nations in the world. It is not supposed to be considered as such. I am not being sarcastic, but the member understands what I mean. That safe third country agreement eliminated a lot of the things at the front end so that we could deal with those that are in the system in a much more appropriate fashion. When I say appropriate, what does that mean?

How does the international community view Canada's immigration and refugee system? The United Nations says that Canada has the best refugee determination system in the western world. The member is right. He wants to improve something, but let me remind

the member that what he wants to improve is already considered to be the best.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Chair, I find it interesting that the minister in his remarks and his answer talked about efficiency and about processing times. The word he did not mention at the beginning of his answer was “justice” and what is fair and just for refugees in this country and for people who need a hearing.

The fact remains that every major refugee serving organization in Canada and many around the world have called for the implementation of a merit based, fact based appeal which does not currently exist in the process.

I still remain very concerned that the government would propose something like this with all of the information that the minister talks about at hand, would make it go through that entire process, would allow people to believe that we were on the verge of improving the system and making it more fair and just, and then would back away from that proposal after it had been passed by Parliament. I still think there is a very serious problem there.

I want to go on to another question. The last time the minister was before the committee I asked about the proposal for changing the system of how settlement contracts are awarded in Ontario through the government. I talked about the request for proposal system and I said to the minister that there were rumours the department was planning on switching to a request for proposal system in Ontario. The minister said that he did not respond to hypotheticals or to rumours. I understand, however, that officials from the department have been having consultations both in Ontario and in British Columbia, where the provincial government that manages the settlement funding goes through a similar request for proposal process.

In British Columbia our experience of that has been absolutely disastrous, to put it mildly. It has taken a sector that was incredibly cooperative, that had built relationships over many, many years, that was effectively covering the province and making sure that settlement services were available across the province in an effective way and it set these groups into a competitive process. They were competitive with each other. It is a very complex process in which some groups just did not have the resources to participate and one that has left gaps and incredibly hard feelings.

I want to ask the minister again, is this kind of process being proposed for Ontario, a request for proposal process? Why would he go down that road when our experience in British Columbia has been so disastrous?

• (2030)

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, I cannot speak to the experience in any one particular province. I can tell the member that as a general rule the federal government is a service provider, but where it is not, when we use service providers we need to go to a process that is competitive, fair and transparent. Those are the elements upon which we operate when we deal with service providers that are not part of any of our departments.

Supply

In most cases these things work well. I thank the member for giving us an indication of situations that might not fit that category. We have not had, to my understanding, the kinds of negative experiences the member has indicated happened in one particular province.

I want to build on that. Just two weeks ago we entered into an arrangement with the province of Ontario and put in place certain measures that would be transferrable to other provinces, outside of Quebec. We put in place additional resources for settlement and integration services that would engage us in an environment where we would have to bring into the fold many more service providers with the expertise to help us achieve our larger national objectives.

It would be unfair to the Canadian public, some of whom are watching this debate tonight, to tell them that we would not go through a competitive, fair and transparent process when we are talking about utilizing public funds for a common good and a common goal.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Chair, I hasten to add that there is another government department that is going through some extremely serious questions about a similar process in the Ontario region. There were major questions raised in the human resources department about a similar kind of process with similar kinds of problems that we have experienced in British Columbia. The minister probably knows a lot about that certain situation.

I have a couple of other questions about settlement. The minister raised the question of the new arrangement with Ontario that was recently announced. I think we all agree that it is good to spend more money on settlement services. We have been calling for that across the country for some time. Ontario certainly needed that assistance, but we are seeing great disparities now between the settlement services available across the country. Ontario has a great deal at the moment, but other provinces are not doing as well in that department.

When the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration was in Alberta, we heard how a lot of new immigrants to Alberta first landed in Ontario. Ontario got the settlement money that was available, but Alberta is doing the work because people end up in Alberta fairly quickly. It is a very unfair situation and is putting huge pressure on the agencies serving immigrants and refugees in Alberta. I am wondering if the minister has a proposal for dealing with that.

In British Columbia a recent report by Simon Fraser University looked at the settlement services and language training services. It showed that a full 47% of the money that the federal government sends to British Columbia for those services goes into general revenues in the province of British Columbia and that it does not go for the services to which it is directed. The provincial government claims that it goes into general revenues and is then spent by colleges for language services, but that is fee for service language instruction. My understanding is that is not what that money from the federal government is to go toward.

I am wondering what steps the minister will take to correct that situation in British Columbia and make sure that the money that is being sent by the federal government for those services is actually spent for those services in British Columbia.

● (2035)

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, when we sign a deal with any province, it is usually under a contribution agreement that has terms and conditions. We fully intend to ensure that our partners on the other side of the table adhere to the terms and conditions. We have a monitoring process and we will ensure that they meet that standard.

As to the first part of the question about whether there are people who land in Ontario, go elsewhere and, therefore, that elsewhere does not get the settlement and integration dollars, it is a dynamic in the country that speaks to the enormous potential that other people realize.

Rounded out, we have about 140,000 landings in Ontario every year. The vast majority of them end up in the city of greater Toronto. That means a city the size of Thunder Bay is replaced in Toronto every single year. Does that create an increased magnet for people to come to Ontario? Yes, perhaps it does. There is a certain dynamic, a critical mass of economy, culture and society. All these things come together. They create a certain formula and attract more and more people.

For each and every one of those people, yes, we have a particular formula that says there are integration and settlement dollars that accrue to the provincial jurisdiction in which these people land, but that is not an eternal lifelong settlement or integration dollar. It is defined in time.

When an individual moves, those funds do not follow but other funds follow. Whenever residency is established in a province, Canada health and social dollars accrue to that province. There is no taking away from Peter to pay Paul. The federal government uses these funds to provide greater flexibility and stability in the movement of people.

The member is right. The economy of Canada, if may I be blatantly partisan for a moment, is in good shape thanks in large measure to this government for its fiscal policies. Over the course of the last 12 years, we have had nine balanced budgets. The interest rates have gone down to the floor so one can actually own property now with mortgages that in some places are below 4%.

We have unemployment rates that in certain provinces like Alberta are below 4.5%. Good heavens, they are probably coming to Ontario and bringing people to Alberta. Why? Because they need people. They have to bring them everywhere they can. Do they need the integration dollars? No, they just need people. They are willing to pay people to work.

What we try to do is facilitate that, thanks in great measure to the good, sound economic and demographic policies of the government. Look at the wealth that is being created around the country. Who ever heard of unemployment rates at these levels? Nobody has. That is why people are moving from great, rich Ontario to even richer Alberta.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.): Mr. Chair, even though this is a nice and comfortable informal atmosphere, I prefer sitting back at my desk.

Supply

The minister has done some good things since he came into office, certainly with parents, grandparents and out of status spouses. However, I am not going to paint a totally rosy picture. We have many good policies in this government. Interest rates for housing are at a 50-year low for mortgages. Yes, I acknowledge that. However, immigration is the lifeblood of the country. It has been in the past and it will be in the future.

The previous minister from York West said that we had some problems. It is incumbent upon us to recognize those problems. If we do not recognize those problems, we will be unable to solve them. I welcome Madam Charette, a relatively new deputy minister who is with us today. I look forward to working with her and I think the Committee on Citizenship and Immigration looks forward to working with her.

However, one of the problems I want to point to initially is this. We have, and we do not know how many, hundreds of thousands of people in the underground economy. Why are these people unable to find their way through the system to get in here?

Let me give an example. A couple of weeks ago I was back in my riding and I talked to a very unhappy constituent. He was an engineer from Pakistan. He came here about two years ago. He left a good job in Pakistan. He had a nice house. He had a nice job. He had a chauffeur. Life was good. However, he thought he could do better in Canada. He is here in Canada. He cannot find a job as an engineer because he has trouble with accreditation.

Quite frankly, we have a lot of engineers in Canada. We have to be very upfront when we attract people here because the point system we have set in place is way too high to allow people in the trades, to allow people who find a way into the underground economy. That has to be revisited. We have to look at whether there is a match between the needs and the people who are coming here. We do nobody any favours getting professionals from other countries if they cannot work here. Unless there is a demand for those kinds of positions, we are always going to have that problem. We must give much greater points to jobs that are needed. That is one.

In the sixties I worked in the construction industry in Toronto. The minister would know about that because there were a lot of ethnic people working in the construction industry in Toronto, Italians, Portuguese, name it. None of them could qualify to come into the country today. I dare say 90% of the immigrants who have come to the country would never qualify under the present point system.

The other problem we have is the whole issue of visas. We have people who come to Canada. Six million Canadians were not born in here. That is a pretty big number. Guess what? These people have brothers, sisters, parents, other relatives and even friends who might want to come and visit. In 1997-98, 70,000 people were turned down. In 2003-04, 150,000-plus people were turned down on visas.

How is this in my constituency office? About a year ago, I had a young couple who came from India. They were in their early thirties. They had two children. The wife found out she had inoperable brain cancer. She had a very short time to live. All this information was provided to the immigration officials. All she wanted was for her mother and her sister to come over. These people did not have an extended family here, but this was a reasonable request. She was a

Canadian, she was dying, surely to God she could get her mother and sister over. They did not come. She died about 28 days after we sent the letter.

Just last week, the mother of three brothers, who are from Pakistan, died here. They have an older brother in Pakistan. They wanted him to come here for the funeral. It would have been nice to have him come to Canada. He did not come.

• (2040)

These are the things we are talking about when say people are being turned down for visas. When people are in Canada surely to God it does not mean they are exiled from their family. Surely they can come and visit them in their home. Something has to be done.

I have another issue which you, Mr. Chair, are aware of as is the minister. It has to do with the whole issue of citizenship.

Back in 2000, when I was parliamentary secretary to the minister of immigration, I discovered that my citizenship, because of the section on revocation of citizenship, first, made me a second class Canadian. Second, if anybody comes after my citizenship, it is more of a political decision than a judicial one. It is a decision that is open to lobbying of politicians and ministers by different ethnic groups. We have all received letters in that regard.

What did I want to do? I said the Citizenship Act preceded the Charter of Rights and Freedoms of 1982 and the act of 1977. I said that the legal section of the charter should be applied. Coming from a communist dictatorship, I know the importance of a judicial system versus a political one. I said in the House that if somebody was ever going to revoke my citizenship, I wanted it done by due process of law, by the courts, according to standards in the Criminal Code. I would not want it done by a political decision that is open to lobbying by different groups. This is incredibly important.

Members on the citizenship committee were promised by the previous minister that a citizenship act would be tabled with us early in February. We still do not have the bill. We spent the month of April going across the country, and we still do not have the promised bill.

What are we going to do to improve dealing with visa refusals? What are we going to do to make our system less political? What are we going to do to regulate the people who are now working in the underground economy, which is very important because they have families and children and they are helping our economy? What are we going to do about getting a citizenship act before committee?

I look forward to the minister's response.

• (2045)

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, there are quite a number of questions there and all of them legitimate. I have already given some initial responses to a couple of them.

Supply

I would like to begin with the last question regarding the regularization of undocumented workers. I indicated that it was going to be one of the priority items that would drive my stay in this office. By the way, as an aside, and I do not mean to make light of it, but immigration ministers typically have a short shelf life. I hope that members will keep that in mind tomorrow when they vote because I want to prolong my shelf life a little longer. I have not accomplished all six priority items and I know members will want to help me get to that.

The member, who is the chair of the citizenship and immigration committee, knows full well that we are addressing undocumented workers. First, let us see how this happens. Undocumented workers are those who come here to fill a job that one of our own Canadians may not be in a position to fill. There are quite a few. They are in the garment industry, restaurant industry, entertainment industry, construction industry, food and food processing industry, and the pipeline and oil industry. They are virtually everywhere.

What happens? Many of our young men and women do not aspire to those jobs. They are in other positions. We are making a huge investment in this country at the federal and provincial levels in ensuring that our young men and women achieve a level of education that allows them to engage in value added professions.

Like the hon. member, I too had an opportunity to work by the sweat of my brow, as they say. My dad did not think I worked hard enough, so I ended up in this position. It is an ennobling thing to be able to work. Many of those industries are starved for workers. We do not produce them. Our birthrate is among the lowest in the world, not just the western world but the world. We are not reproducing ourselves. We are not providing the marketplace with people to work.

What happens? Employers look for workers wherever they can find them. They bring them here. The member is right. Many of these people would not pass the point system that we have put in place. Why? Because we have put in place a system that puts greater value on formal education, specialized training, and linguistic abilities no matter where it is received. We are not interested as much, or have not been recently, in those who can fill the jobs that other Canadians are unprepared to fill.

They come here and some would say that the situation is unhelpful, but the economy does need them. They are here. We have to deal with them. We have to regularize them. We have to bring them to a point where they can be like all others who are landed legitimately, and all others who have become productive and contributing members of our society. They are valued and ennobled. They have dignity and we need to treat them in that way.

I made that commitment. It was one of the first things that I said I would do. We would regularize those who are here. However, we must identify them where they are.

By nature those who are undocumented do not go around and say that they are undocumented. They do not tell us where they live, so if we find them, we could send them back. They do not do that. They actually go and work as many hours as they can. They labour. They get around the enforcement agencies that might be available and we want to bring them into the fold. We need to bring them into the fold

because they are good for us. They help the economy. They generate society.

Mr. Chair, I do not know why you are rushing me because I have all of the answers—

• (2050)

The Chair: If I could interrupt the minister, the member for Kitchener—Waterloo requested a couple of minutes at the end to wrap up his remarks as well in response to you. It is now his time, so I will recognize the member for Kitchener—Waterloo.

I know we are going to get through all six points with the minister before the end of the evening. The member for Kitchener—Waterloo has the floor.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Mr. Chair, the way to fix regularization is to also fix the point system, so that the people the economy needs can come here legally. I think that is very important. We have too many professionals, too many degrees, but not enough people with trades. In many areas we are dying for trades.

The minister did not answer my question regarding visas and I would like to have an answer to that question. If we have people who are going to come here, live here and become Canadians, they have a right to have their relatives come and visit them.

Let me say to the minister that we will be looking forward to him coming to committee with his able deputy minister. We will be looking for answers on how to improve the visa situation.

The other issue that the minister did not touch on is the whole issue with citizenship which is really my passion. I am sick and tired of being a second class Canadian and essentially under the Citizenship Act that is exactly what we are. If we were not born in Canada, when it comes to revocation, we should forget the charter because it does not apply right now. I want to see that bill come before the committee. The committee made it its number one priority. We were promised that by the government when it said it was going to modernize the Citizenship Act. We were promised by the previous minister back in February. We are now in May and we need that bill.

I and the committee look forward to working with the minister because we have a good system, but I think we can make it better. Everything is not perfect in the system, but we can improve it and we can do a better job.

Mr. Lee Richardson (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Chair, in respect of the new system that you are operating under here tonight, I will give notice that I intend to devote the first five minutes or so of my time to outline some of the problems with the current immigration system and what my party proposes to do about it. I will follow that with questions for the minister and I would expect to receive responses proportionate to the length of time of the questions asked.

Supply

It is pretty clear already from the discussion here tonight that we have an unfortunate situation in the Department of Citizenship and Immigration. It is in a mess. The system has serious problems. There is a perception problem as well in the country and internationally with regard to Canada and our immigration system. There is a sense that there is a partisan influence that is ill-affecting the department and that the employees are demoralized as a result of this effect. There is this perception of partisan motivation, changing the system, and people jumping queues. It has created a massive backlog. It takes up to four weeks to process a simple passport application, 22 weeks to receive a permanent resident card and 8 to 9 months for a citizenship card.

This reflects badly on our country as well as the anticipation and eagerness of people wanting to come to our country and to welcome family members to join them here. Policy is being made on the fly. We saw this in the case of the unfortunate tsunami victims who were mentioned by my hon. colleague from Calgary—Nose Hill earlier.

A program was cobbled together very quickly to say we were going to step up to the plate and help these people without the assets or resources to do that. The department had to take people from other embassies and consulates around the world into these areas. What happened to the people waiting in line at the time? Well, they were just pushed farther back in line and had to wait a little longer.

It was political posturing causing those people to be stuck longer in queues waiting for their loved ones, having paid their money and having sent in an application. There is this whole notion of the Liberals tackling immigration policy by politically advantageous announcements and reacting in a piecemeal fashion to crisis, scandals and mismanagement rather than a real effort to fix a broken system. This is not something we take lightly on this side of the House because it affects us all greatly.

Members' staffs of all parties find they are spending up to 70% or 80% of their time, while others wait to deal with immigration matters because the department is so overloaded and overworked that it cannot deal with the demand of Canadians to access the system. This of course increases as the inefficiencies increase, and the workloads and the backlogs increase.

Unfortunately, as we have heard tonight, the department is not a priority for the Liberals. They cut Citizenship and Immigration Canada funding in the early 1990s. Face to face processing was eliminated. Offices were closed and 35% of the officers abroad were cut. Interviews that were waived added to an increased reliance on local staff, the offloading of immigration problems, as I have mentioned, to offices of members of Parliament. There is a lax removal policy where we have people who should not be in the country just lost within our system.

As was mentioned by my colleague from Calgary—Nose Hill, we are grateful for the work and the extra effort that has been extended over the years by front line workers in the department, but we find there is a morale problem. Employees are stressed and overworked. There is a lack of resources to keep up. The minister admitted this when he first came into this portfolio. As late as March 9, I read in the *Montreal Gazette* that the minister said: "But that is the same Parliament that never put an additional penny forward for

immigration in the last five years". Even he admitted that his department was not a priority with the government.

● (2055)

Here is what we might do to rectify this problem. As my colleague has mentioned, the Conservative Party and the member of Parliament for Calgary—Nose Hill in particular have worked tirelessly to develop a sensible, mainstream set of policies and reforms.

At a policy convention held by the Conservative Party in Montreal recently, we passed a number of strongly supported motions outlining a welcoming and well managed immigration system, with a plan to reorganize the application process so that applicants are getting accurate information as to what to expect when they apply, so they are ready and able to obtain information on the status of their files and so they are given service in a considerate and professional manner.

We have also conducted a series of round table consultations on immigration, meetings we held coast to coast to seek advice, ideas, concerns and suggestions from people directly involved in the system. We got a number of consistent replies from people who were heartbroken with the length of time processing took. We are also working on proposing solutions to growing problems.

What we heard over and over is that the system reeks of political favouritism. This is sullyng the department and the perception of Canada as being a fair and just country. There is a lack of resources to deal with even the most pressing concerns. These problems need to be addressed. We look for answers to these questions, hopefully in the very near future with a new minister of immigration and a new government.

I would like now to ask two questions. I will try to limit the length of the questions and hope that for a change we can have the minister limit his replies to a proportionate time.

On April 18, 2005, the government announced it would increase the number of sponsored parents and grandparents that are admitted. What the minister has not told the public is that the backlog of these applications for sponsorship approval is now estimated to be over 110,000. Many of these applications include multiple applicants; it is only after stage one, sponsorship approval, that the application is sent to the appropriate embassy for the real work of medical exams, criminal security interviews, et cetera, and this can take years.

Even worse, those 110,000 applications currently backlogged for parent and grandparent sponsorship approval do not even cover the applications waiting at embassies around the world. There is no excuse for the minister not to inform prospective applicants as to how long they can reasonably expect to wait.

I ask the minister this. What is the estimated number of outstanding applications at embassies and consulates? What is the estimated timeline and year that applications will be looked at?

Supply

• (2100)

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, let me address some of these things. I guess I will have plenty of time to address some of the issues that were raised.

First, the permanent residency card processing is now at about four weeks and people can get something on an urgent basis in 48 hours. For those who are concerned about the accelerated process, people are actually putting resources and technology in place so that we can get these things done in a timely fashion. Just think about that: four weeks and then 48 hours for emergencies.

Second, the member wanted to know how many applications there are abroad in the backlog inventory for parents and grandparents. I indicated at the beginning of my remarks that there were about 110,000 people. I think the exact number is 105,677, but that number indicates people, it does not indicate applications. And of course we have to provide the appropriate health and security checks. That has all been done, but how have we done that already? We are not waiting for a new minister. We are not waiting for a new government—

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister. We will hear from the hon. member for Calgary Centre.

Mr. Lee Richardson: Mr. Chair, again I will try to keep my questions brief to follow with the new format and the rules of the House and hope that the minister would also do the same.

In June 2003 the government stopped indexing applications; this means opening the application, assigning a case number and putting it on line to prepare for processing. All the department has been doing since is counting the envelopes, so there is no idea of how many people these envelopes represent.

While the government is not processing the applications, it is still cashing the cheques. It is about \$1,500 that people put in their envelopes. They are received at the department, the cheques are taken out and the applications sit and sit and sit. This was pointed out earlier by my colleague.

In addition to that, the revenue gained from these envelopes, these applications, has doubled. The fees have doubled since 1994 while the departmental budget has been reduced, so what is it with this money? Is it fair to people to have their money taken in great anticipation and expectation that their applications will be processed when they are going to take years to process?

• (2105)

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, I thought we were having a reasonable discussion and debate. We have to make sure that we understand exactly what it is that happens in the process. There is an application fee and then there is a landing fee, so when we are talking about \$1,500 we are talking about the overall amount once everybody has landed. But that is not the amount of money that people necessarily have to put forward.

The idea is that, yes, this does take place, but over the course of the last four months that we have been here we have been addressing all of these concerns that have been highlighted by members of the committee. The committee members are right here with us. They did not hide. They did not run away. These are the people who have been

working on this for many years and they have been providing feedback to people who are here.

The fees have not changed. They have not doubled. Nothing like that has happened. We have to be able to tell the facts, to tell the truth, so that when we are going to make a statement, whether it is for political purposes or not, it has to be accurate. There has been a spike in the amount of revenues, but not a spike—

The Deputy Chair: On a point of order, the hon. member for Calgary Centre.

Mr. Lee Richardson: Excuse me, Mr. Chair, I would like to defend my position. He has to stop these accusations. He constantly does this. There has been no answer here at all. It is a constant cheap shot that people are not telling the truth.

That is not what I said. I simply said that the revenue this department has gained, not the individual applications going up, yes, that is \$1,500—

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, that is \$1,500 because that is the amount of money in total that is sent with these applications—

Mr. Lee Richardson: The revenues have gone up, doubled, in the last 10 years.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Calgary Centre has asked a question of the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. The minister was in the middle of answering his question. I am sure he was getting to the point that the member wanted to hear as an answer. Let us let the minister finish the answer.

Mr. Lee Richardson: I have objected to that—

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Let us get back to the facts, Mr. Chair—

Mr. Lee Richardson: No, let us have him apologize right now. I have had enough of this. I am telling—

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, let—

Mr. Lee Richardson: —Joe Volpe—

The Deputy Chair: May I remind the hon. member that he must refer to the member by his title. Would the member please let the minister answer.

I am sure that the Minister of Immigration understands that he must be careful in his choice of words, in his choice of expressions and in his way of answering the questions. We will let the minister answer the question. Thank you.

• (2110)

Hon. Joseph Volpe: As I was saying, Mr. Chair, when we are going to make a distinction about whether it is revenues or fees, I acknowledge that there was a spike in revenues because of course we have a spike in applications, but there has been no increase in fees. The fees are divided into two parts: the application fee and of course as well the landing fee, which does not have to be paid until someone has landed.

That does not diminish the fact that we have a greater and greater number of applicants. We are in the business of processing all of them. We want to make sure that all those who want to come to this country and fit those criteria that we—

Supply

The Deputy Chair: Thank you, Minister. We will now recognize the hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River.

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I am quite pleased to participate in this debate tonight. It is a procedure I actually have not previously participated in. It is of course intended to shed some light on, focus on the scrutiny of and challenge the expenditures of the ministry that we are dealing with here tonight.

This happens only a couple of times a year and is usually driven by members of the opposition, but there are a lot of government members who take great interest in all of our ministries. From time to time we cannot locate the minister in the caucus room to have a few words with him or her, so we like to have this opportunity in the House to take up issues.

I would like to address the refugee determination system. Clearly Canada's traditions are known and respected around the world. Whenever I have had the privilege of representing Canadians as a parliamentarian in my travels, those traditions and those Canadian ways of doing things are recognized in many countries around the world. We are often congratulated, and occasionally criticized, but for the most part we tend to do things well and that is recognized.

One of the things Canada does is provide safe haven for individuals who may face persecution in their homelands when they flee from internal strife. Over the last 10 years Canada has been able to accommodate about 250,000 people. We call them refugees or asylum seekers.

That seems like a large number. It is about 25,000 per year. They are accommodated in our immigration target number, which is at this time about 240,000 per year. This means that refugee landings are about 10% of our immigration intake. It seems to be working reasonably well but not flawlessly. It never has. Of course, refugee procedures do not work well in any country. All countries recognize this and continue attempts at improvement.

I am going to make a few remarks and then I am going to ask a question of the minister. I know he will want to give us an answer.

The world today is a much different world than it was 50 years ago at the end of the second world war. It is a much different world now than it was when the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was created to deal with people's movements around the world.

The post-war situation was much different than the one we have now. Canadians know that. Canadians see that. I represent a riding that is 75% immigrant. That is a very large percentage. Those immigrants know the immigration system very well. They have been here 5 years, 10 years or 50 years. The people in my riding know the immigration system. My work as a member of Parliament in the constituency is about 90% immigration. Whenever the minister wants to let the portfolio go, I could probably take over for a few days quite nicely, with the help of my constituents, of course.

Many of the urban ridings have large numbers of immigrants. Let me say that when there are difficulties, obstacles, discontinuities, these problems in the immigration system, there is no better place to know where the problems are than in an immigrant community. Immigrants know where the problems are. They see them and they

talk about them. Many of these people, through their families, experience these difficulties.

There have been huge changes in people migrations around the world. It is easier to move around the world now. There are people who, for pay, smuggle people around the world. There are movements of that type. There are also drought, famine and all kinds of things.

• (2115)

Most countries now are suggesting that we have to make some reforms. We have to make some changes. These discussions are happening at the UN and they are happening here among MPs who are active on this file. We are talking about it.

Canadians know that accepting refugees is part of our core values as Canadians but they also know that our system is abused. Our immigrant Canadians know it. They see that there is abuse from time to time. A little abuse is fixed in one part and then something happens somewhere else. That one is fixed up and then it happens again. It is similar to a leaky roof, I guess. Our core value is to extend the compassion that we always have.

I will move to the immigration and refugee determination system. The 2005-06 report on plans and priorities for citizenship and immigration notes that the department along with the Immigration and Refugee Board, the Department of Justice and the Canada Border Services Agency will be developing processes to help improve Canada's domestic refugee determination system.

Could the minister outline what types of changes are envisaged, what we are going to do to try to reduce the abuse and resource a compassionate, effective refugee determination system?

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, first let me compliment the member on being able to reflect his constituency in the effective way that he has indicated. As he said, with 75% of that population falling into the category of immigrant community, just think for a moment about what it means. It means that we have a wonderful democratic institution where constituents can go to their member and express to him or her not only the issues of a larger Canadian environment or vision but those that relate to them most directly with their families and loved ones.

He also raised the issue of the refugee determination system. We have already said that we are looking at the process, looking at access and looking at consequences. We want to see that those who have a right to claim asylum get access to the system as quickly as possible.

We have taken other measures, as I indicated earlier. We have looked at a safe third country agreement. We look at other measures that deal with visas so that we prevent those who are not genuine asylum seekers at the front end, but we deal with those who are genuine in a process time that is efficient and effective.

Supply

We have made investments in the IRB. The chief commissioner of the IRB has put forward an action plan that we are accepting and implementing. Already we have seen an elimination of a backlog. It went from 52,000 to about 25,000 in this last year. What do we do about consequences? We are working on a situation that would see greater finality and immediacy to a decision so that those who are genuine can get on with their lives and those who are deemed to be something else are removed so that they can get on with their lives elsewhere.

Mr. Derek Lee: Mr. Chair, at this time the legal process for refugee determination involves a hearing and a determination by the Immigration and Refugee Board. There is not, as I understand it, a technical direct second level of appeal to that. An individual can go to the Federal Court and allege a defect in the process and have a review in that way.

I personally feel that the system is working rather well with all of the challenges that it has, but I do have a question for the minister. Has the department given any consideration to the alleged unfairness that may exist from time to time when that first level of determination does not have a built in second level appeal process? Can he comment on whether or not he or the department is considering any revisions to the system that would allow another level of appeal? That may drive some people crazy. Many Canadians think that there is enough due process built in with the determination at point of entry, the determination process and then the possible appeal to the Federal Court, et cetera. Could the minister comment on that?

• (2120)

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, as I indicated earlier, I had already committed to the standing committee that we would be looking at a system that would include the member's concerns. I also said that I would look at alternatives to the RAD, i.e., another appeal process, or I would commit to doing something that we had already put in place.

I want to again repeat that an appeal can be made to the Federal Court. There is an appeal that can be classified as one to the pre-removal risk assessment. An appeal can always be made on humanitarian or compassionate grounds. All of these really speak to the issue that someone does not want to accept the fact that there was a negative decision. The problem is not associated with those who receive a positive decision, and we do have many positive decisions.

The member outlined the numbers. Over the course of the last 10 years some 250,000 refugees have landed in Canada. That is about 25,000 per year, which is not an insignificant number. He indicated that represents about 10% of all those who have landed in this country. The Parliament of Canada accepted that range as an appropriate number to fit in our immigration plan, an immigration plan which the House of Commons approves every November.

Mr. Derek Lee: Mr. Chair, another aspect of refugee determination involves the relatively large proportion of refugee claimants who come across the border from the United States. They are not just Americans claiming refugee status, but people from other countries who have found their way into the United States and have decided to come across the border. It includes some refugees from Central America as well.

I wonder if the department has had sufficient experience with the new safe third country agreement that was entered into happily between Canada and the United States just over the last year or so. I was happy I did not hold my breath waiting for that agreement. It took a long time to negotiate it and a long time for the United States Congress and officials here to actually put that treaty into place, but it finally happened.

Since there has been such a high proportion of refugees coming across the border, I wonder if we are able to make any kind of assessment as to how that has impacted our refugee claim numbers. My guess would be that our refugee claim numbers would drop substantially because the agreement provides that any refugee claimant, with a few exceptions, who come to the Canadian border from the United States must go back and have their refugee claims determined in the United States. The agreement works both ways with parties in Canada going to the U.S. being similarly dealt with here.

I wonder if there has been enough experience yet. Could the minister comment on that?

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, I have two answers for the member.

First of all, we implement visa restrictions on some countries where we see an excessive number of applicants for refugee determination. We do that after consulting with all of the departments that might have an impact on it, including the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Canada Border Services Agency.

With reference to the question the member asked about some of the consequences of the implementation of the safe third country agreement, it has only been in place for four months, since December 29. We only have about three months of digestible data. In the first month we had about a 50% drop. That dropped about 20% over the previous year and 50% again in April. We have had a reduction on inland claims at airports and other—

• (2125)

The Deputy Chair: Resuming debate, the hon. member for Louis-Hébert.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Clavet (Louis-Hébert, BQ): Mr. Chair, I am extremely pleased to be able to take part in this committee of the whole examination of the Citizenship and Immigration estimates. My feelings are, however, somewhat mixed: pleasure and pride, but mixed with sadness too. I will explain.

I like this format very much. No confrontation, rather like the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. At least most of the time we strive for that. We work in a non-partisan atmosphere. Regardless of the country chosen, be it Quebec or be it Canada, we can readily agree on one thing: newcomers, the immigrants who make up the fabric of a country, are essential.

I am pleased we can participate in this discussion and exchange views despite our differences. We will agree, or we will disagree, but we will in the end perhaps make more progress than is made with the usual approach to discussions in this House, where there is so much name-calling and we often get nowhere.

Supply

So I am pleased to take part in this debate because immigration is so important to me. The primary reason for my involvement in politics is immigration, the people I have seen arrive from other countries, who have chosen a new destination with the hope of being able to live there, who are anxious to do so, but who are often disappointed. They are not disappointed because someone has maliciously decided to make Canada's immigration system a deliberate obstacle to their integration or a threat to their integrity. That is not the way it happens.

I have been a member of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration for nearly a year now, and I realize what a huge maze the department is, and how people's good intentions can get lost in that maze. People with every good intention on arrival, find themselves driving taxis and do not understand why, when they were engineers back home. Why? Because suddenly their qualifications are not recognized here. Is this done with malicious intent? Rarely, if ever. Yet the result is the same.

Finally, people leave their countries and come here hoping for a new beginning. In the case of refugees, it is sad. The minister is well aware of it. He and I and colleagues working on the committee see some sad cases. We see people who simply want things we consider essential, like seeing a brother or sister again. They are not entitled to do so.

I also feel some sadness at having to intervene in this debate, because I believe, and people will agree—the minister himself will acknowledge it—immigration should come under provincial jurisdiction. This is my point. Obviously, we have not got there yet. And so my intervention will serve to point out the intrusions into areas of Quebec's jurisdiction.

In fact, we are not privileged to have this exclusive jurisdiction, far from it. Instead, we have the Canada-Quebec agreement concluded in 1991. I say instead, because that would change things a lot.

What concerns me especially are all these government initiatives relating to the budget, the votes we are studying, which reach far beyond federal jurisdictions. Strictly speaking, once again, it is an area Quebec considers the federal government has no business in. This is not its area.

I have a number of reservations to express to the minister with respect to the recognition of foreign credentials. We have lab technicians coming from countries where they are fully qualified. I think people on the committee recognized it a number of times. We are back from a Canadian tour, where we heard from witnesses. We heard it in Regina, Calgary, Winnipeg and Quebec City. The phenomenon is the same. Recognition of foreign credentials is not working.

At the provincial level, work is already underway with professional bodies. It makes sense to recognize that the provinces are in the best position to deal with the work done by professional bodies.

In all honesty and with due respect to the minister, things are muddled in the department. I think that, if he stays there long enough, things might become a little clearer. As he said earlier, the lifespan of a minister at Citizenship and Immigration is short. We

have already had two ministers. I hope we can count on an incumbent who stays long enough to improve people's fate.

• (2130)

Over the past several years, Quebec and other provinces have developed the expertise needed to appropriately recognize foreign credentials, since this varies from one province to another. The requirements for a skilled tradesperson are not the same in Ontario as they are in Quebec, nor are they the same in Saskatchewan as they are in Manitoba.

I wonder—with all due respect for the minister—why the federal government is interfering in an area of provincial jurisdiction, especially one that has to do with training people and assessing their training.

I find, and I am sure I am not alone, that the business of supply for Citizenship and Immigration Canada involves more than just rearranging some figures. This is not about figures, it is about human beings. We realized this when we were touring and we realize this every day.

From the outside looking in it seems as though we are only concerned with figures: we need this many refugees and that many new arrivals. However, we are dealing with men and women who chose a country. We may not agree on the name of the country they chose. I would say Quebec, others would say Canada, but they chose a new country to live in as free and proud people.

I have a question I would like to ask first and then I will follow it up with a few more. I think that is more or less the format we will use.

Why does the government absolutely insist on causing headaches for the provinces, on provoking disputes in the courts, on wasting time and energy interfering—once again—in a process that is working just fine? It may not be perfect, but it works. Why does the government absolutely insist on entering into an area that belongs to the provinces?

[English]

Hon. Hedy Fry (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Chair, currently we live in a country called Canada, in which there are 10 provinces. We have found that when people come to Canada they may come to province A, but then they may wish to move to province B, C or D, depending upon whether there is a job or a family in that province. It therefore is imperative that the federal government play a huge leadership role in coordinating where people can go across this great country.

In order to do that and in order to help get foreign credentials recognized, we have had to deal with every provincial government and every provincial credential recognizing body which have all told us the same thing. All of the credential recognizing bodies, whether they are in the medical professional or engineers, have said that they would like to see a model in which people can be licensed to practise in Canada and—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Louis—Hébert.

[Translation]

Mr. Roger Clavet: Mr. Chair, I thank my colleague for trying to remind us that obviously she is referring to Canada.

Supply

An hon. member: It is a reality.

Mr. Roger Clavet: Undeniably, it is Canada.

My colleague should be familiar enough with sections 92 and 93 of “her” Canada. The Constitution Act, 1867, clearly grants—and no one will contest this—exclusive jurisdiction—and I am not saying all combined—for professional bodies to the provinces. That is the law of “her” Canada, as the member should know.

Why is the government interfering in an area of jurisdiction clearly defined in “her” country's Constitution?

[*English*]

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Chair, I think I answered that. We have worked with the autonomous bodies under law that have designed to decide on foreign credential recognition. They have all said that we need to work across Canada on foreign credential recognition, not simply this vulcanized way of doing it province to province. Most of the provinces we have spoken to have agreed and have been working with us to create this kind of seamless way of recognizing credentials across the country.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Clavet: Mr. Speaker, the other side is talking about balkanization. I will ask the question differently: Is the government trying to tell us that its interference in discussions between the professional associations and the provinces is not slowing down negotiations in all provinces?

The other side must admit that the federal government does not have the same expertise—and I am not trying to be mean—it does not have the same competence as the provinces, which, for years, have been working on the recognition of foreign credentials.

Is the parliamentary secretary opposite telling us that the federal government is better than the provinces at something they clearly excel at, the recognition of foreign credentials?

● (2135)

[*English*]

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Chair, what the federal government is saying is that neither the federal government nor the provincial governments have expertise in foreign credential recognition. This is done by the regulatory bodies for the various professions. They have the expertise.

As such, we are working with those regulatory bodies who have the expertise and who are charged under the law to decide who could practise or not practise under those professions. Those are the groups who we are working with. Those are the groups who have asked us to work with them.

We are not intervening. We are responding to requests from others to deal with this issue.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Clavet: Mr. Chair, the next question is an obvious one: how can such a policy be reconciled with section 25 of the Canada-Quebec accord, which is well known and well read? This accord states, “Canada undertakes to withdraw from specialized economic integration services to be provided by Québec—”. The Bloc Québécois' researchers are not the ones saying this; section 25 of

the Canada-Quebec accord is. It stipulates that “Canada undertakes to withdraw from services”. How can anyone reconcile such a policy with section 25?

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, we transfer money to Quebec, the province responsible for integrating those wishing to settle in Quebec to start their new life as Canadians. That is that. It is quite simple. We always respect the agreements.

New arrivals need to be integrated into their Canadian surroundings. If these surroundings happen to be within Quebec's borders, we respect this agreement and provide the provincial authorities with all the money they need to carry out the program.

Mr. Roger Clavet: Mr. Chair, I thank the minister for his response. He made a distinction between the money and the integration programs. I just have the following question: could he explain why such a small amount of money was allocated for the Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program?

The amount that was just announced was \$20 million a year, not for Quebec, but for all of Canada. It is a big country with many provinces. The minister himself said that integration was a federal responsibility. That is not a lot of money, \$20 million, for all these provinces in this very large country called Canada. I want to know if the minister can explain this measly amount.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, I do not know where the member opposite gets his numbers. In a previous response, I mentioned that the federal government pays the Government of Quebec \$181.6 million for integration and everything else related to immigration. It is not \$20 million, but \$181.6 million. That is almost more than all the other funds we inject throughout Canada. Quebec welcomes 25% of all immigrants arriving in Canada. That is why we pay Quebec \$181.6 million.

● (2140)

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Chair, Canada's immigration history has not always been a very positive and very happy experience for some. I am thinking of the Chinese community in Canada. Men came to Canada and lived almost all their lives away from family, from their wives, their children, their parents.

We learned something from that: immigrants had to be given every assistance to reunite with their family members. Family reunification was one of the responsibilities of the Government of Canada. The help needed is not only psychological, but social as well. We know it is necessary to help immigrants integrate smoothly into Canadian society. As well, young children can attend school, learn the language and become full-fledged Canadians.

There are, however, a number of problems with this law and these regulations. One area of concern for us is the long delay in processing applications by Canadian residents or citizens to bring relatives such as grandparents into Canada.

Supply

There is, therefore, one question I would like to ask the minister about the number of sponsorship applications for parents and grandparents. This number is constantly on the rise, so processing times are constantly getting longer. This is extremely frustrating for the people who are here, and of course also for the family members left behind.

I am therefore asking the minister whether he foresees the possibility of changing the regulations so that a speedier sponsorship process could be used to reunite families more quickly.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, my short answer is yes. We are doing this. We are following the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration and of the caucus the member chaired.

As was already noted, because of this committee's recommendations, I have taken steps to bring over parents and grandparents who had already been sponsored by their children and grandchildren. Why? Because our mission is family reunification. As I said already, we were able to do this thanks to two measures: we increased the number of people we land in Canada and the number of multiple entry visas.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Mr. Chair, in fact, we have made a number of recommendations to the minister. I want to thank him for his rapid response in order to help reunite families.

I have another question for the minister. When the minister made that statement, many Canadians told us, "Yes, but you know, grandparents coming here are elderly, they will not be able to work, they will be supported by Canadian taxpayers and they may need medication or health care. Who will pay for all that? Who will be responsible for all that?"

This issue is extremely important to Canadians. Can the minister respond to this?

• (2145)

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, I have to recognize my weakness in French. I will therefore answer the question in English, if I may.

[*English*]

When an application for sponsorship is presented, the sponsor assumes a 10 year responsibility to provide for the health, accommodation and livelihood costs of the people sponsored. Those who come here on the multiple entry visa that we use are subject to recommendations of the task force. We said that we would give them a multiple entry visa but that for the period of that multiple entry visa they would need to provide health insurance for the duration of the period. That is an additional cost that sponsors would assume.

Some of the members thought, in utilizing their expertise in the insurance business, that perhaps we could encourage a private sector insurer to come forward with a package specifically for those people to reduce their costs and allow greater numbers to avail themselves of that possibility. We are still working on that.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Mr. Chair, I have one last question for the minister on the definition of the family. We know that the department prepares of list of priorities it uses to determine the type of relationship between an immigrant and the person he will be

sponsoring and the members of the family who will have priority and so on down the line.

We have discussed the possibility of establishing a definition of family. We know that a family is defined variously according to the culture. This is a matter I want to put to the minister. In Canada, the family is really a man and a woman, one or two children and grandparents. That is about it. We know that other countries favour a much broader concept of family. I wonder whether the minister would care to enlighten us on how he and his department see the priorities within the family class, and the definition of the family in terms of Canadian immigration.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, regardless, we comply with Canadian law, which has a certain definition of couples and the family. I would repeat, Canadian law includes a definition the Immigration Act must honour.

However, there are other families and groups. This department continues to try to be sensitive to these groups, which are much more extensive than the example cited in Canadian legislation. Canadian legislation takes precedence with respect to families that have shown their good faith.

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Mr. Chair, tonight I will give some introductory background and then go over some current and future difficulties. As well, I will have a series of short questions for which I hope to get short answers.

I consider myself to be the luckiest member of Parliament because I am from not only the most beautiful area of the world but an area that in the near future will be in need of tens of thousands of additional workers. Our population will double in the next 15 years.

I come from northeastern Alberta, the constituency of Fort McMurray—Athabasca. The area will need 100,000 more people to be employed directly or indirectly by the oil sands in the near future. Many of these workers make \$80,000 per year. We need many different trades people, doctors, lawyers and many different types of people. Indeed, there will be some 240,000 jobs by 2008, directly or indirectly, attributed to the oil sands.

What I would like to find out from the minister is what the plan is to get more overseas employees directly into the oil sands and those areas and get them to stay. I understand we will not have enough workers domestically to supply those needs.

• (2150)

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, the member has underscored what I said earlier in another response, which is that we have a shortage of semi-skilled, skilled and even unskilled workers. However HRSD, Human Resources and Skills Development, and CIC, Citizenship and Immigration Canada and Alberta just signed an agreement that will allow CIC to bring in workers on a temporary basis and then obviously HRSD will validate positions that cannot be filled by Canadians.

Supply

A series of programs are already in place that aim to bring as many Canadians internally into the market that is hot for whatever reason. It includes, in particular, special programs to engage more and more of the aboriginal communities in our economy.

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Chair, I am aware of the signing of the division 8 agreement with the province of Alberta. I am wondering what steps have been taken domestically to find these workers prior to establishing and signing this agreement to bring some 6,000 to 15,000 temporary foreign workers who are actually going to fly from South America into northern Alberta. What other steps have been taken by the minister to communicate these needs domestically?

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, the member will know that much of the responsibility for communicating need rests with the employers themselves. They engage Human Resources and Skills Development which has the opportunity, on the basis of the engagement of these employers, to do the market analysis and assessment for those employers in parts of Canada where there appear to be resident potential employees.

In fact, Human Resources and Skills Development has programs where it also participates in developing the skills of some of the talent, and where that fails we are asked at CIC to bring in temporary foreign workers.

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Chair, has there been any preference given to this area as far as the relocation of immigrants who do come in and who have these skill sets? Has there been any identification by the minister's department of the skill sets necessary and encouragement of relocation to go into that area?

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, the member must know that this is a duty that is discharged by our colleague departments at HRSD to do the market analysis. We are in the business of following up on that once a position has been validated, meaning that there is not a Canadian who can fill it, whether he or she has the skill sets or not, and then we are asked to provide the appropriate visas to ensure that others can fill that spot so that the economy does not implode.

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Chair, I understand that answer but I am curious as to what steps have been taken to have full time foreign immigrants come into this country, take those jobs, live here and establish families, instead of having temporary jobs filled where they fly in and out of the country and take the money back with them and, quite frankly, do not help the economy as they should. We need to keep the oil sands as a natural resource that we can manage properly so we can feed, clothe, buy toys at Wal-Mart and everything else that Canadians want to do. What steps have been taken to address those specific needs and look for long term permanent residents of Canada, permanent immigrants, instead of these temporary workers?

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, the response is multifaceted. The very first thing is that we need to be able to set broader targets on the range of people we would bring into the country. The second thing we need to do is develop a system that would allow for some of these skill sets to be brought in. In other words, we have to classify our prospective applicants differently.

We then have to engage the provinces, in this case the province of Alberta, through the provincial nominee program in order to draw such people in, because they will do some of that research themselves. They will tell us how many people they want to be landed in their province, specifically because they meet the needs of

their particular province. We did that last year. There was huge participation by the provincial authorities in the 236,000 that we landed last year.

• (2155)

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Chair, I understand that but what steps have been taken to deal with this area in particular and obviously the tremendous growth that is taking place here and the tremendous need for workers on a full time basis, not a temporary basis? We are not looking for temporary employees who will spend their money overseas.

What steps have been taken to find those people in other countries and what steps have been taken to make sure they land in that area, because that is not what is happening right now?

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, I can appreciate a little bit of the frustration of the member opposite. If the economy is humming along, as it is currently in Alberta and in other places, we want to take advantage of that, not just in the short term but also to build a society on the basis of that long term. That is why the provincial nominee program is working and working well. The provinces are given an opportunity to select the people they would like or select the people they would like to permanently land.

We can help. They will have an opportunity in November when we set the broad ranges and we might be able to increase them. Those are the very first two steps that need to take place but some of these cannot take place until there is the final labour market assessment in Canada overall.

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Chair, it is encouraging to know that no steps have been taken if those are the first two that need to be taken. I am very concerned. We have had a high demand rate in this area for a long period of time. We have a very small percentage of people coming from overseas. We have a non-renewable resource here. They are not making any more land just like they are not making any more oil and if we manage it properly, we can have a long term, very strong and robust economy.

Have any steps been taken to address the issue of long term immigration needs for foreign workers on a permanent basis in that area? I have not heard of any.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, I will repeat it again. What we do is we go out of our way to research out people. In fact, the department is becoming much more of a recruitment agency worldwide for those who want to come to Canada and fit the needs of Canadians everywhere. We engage the provinces and we are asking them to be a greater and much more involved partner in seeking out those who they think meet the needs of their particular province as dictated by the economy of the moment.

However, we cannot, while we are doing that long term, ignore the fact that the economy requires people then and there. The reason we have the temporary workers program is so we can be immediate while we are planning long range.

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Chair, I am sure all those people who are watching today who are unemployed will be happy to hear that, in places in Canada that have up to 25% unemployment, they are seeking these temporary workers and providing these permits.

Supply

I wonder, though, whether there will be any steps taken to address this issue or will we continue to hear that we have to assess, we have to do more studies and we have to wait for certain periods of time.

I will ask my question again. Will the minister take steps to do what is necessary to ensure that this long term beneficial economic resource that we have is managed properly and get full time people from other countries into that area who will stay and live there and spend their money there?

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, I think some of the arguments are beginning to be a little circular. The member ought to understand that we are spending a lot of money and developing a come to Canada portal so that we can encourage people from all over the world to see what we need province by province, industry by industry. We would have that kind of advertisement right off the bat.

As for those areas around the country that have 25% unemployment, let me tell the member and the House what we are doing. Together with HRSD, we are putting in place training programs to take advantage of those who are long term unemployable because of the structure of the economy, the changing economy where they are. We have spent \$25 million to establish learning centres sponsored by unions with specific skills.

We entered into AHRD agreements and ASEP agreements with the aboriginal community to take advantage of all of those who are available in those two communities in those areas. We also engage in skills development locally and in other places to help people transfer from where they are to where the jobs might be. Those are very specific programs. We spend hundreds of millions of dollars a year in order to bring skilled labour to a demand economy.

• (2200)

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Chair, how many people have actually been relocated to northern Alberta under this program over the last three or four years? I would be very interested to hear that. How many people have actually immigrated to northern Alberta from other areas of Canada under this program?

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, one of the frustrating things sometimes that we deal with is that people ask, "Why don't you get all of those who are unemployed in some place?" I am happy to mention that in passing with some of my colleagues in Newfoundland and Labrador they say that they would like to get back all those who have landed in Fort McMurray. There is a bigger population of those from Atlantic Canada in Alberta than there. They want to bring them back.

We try to engage the province in recruiting in Canada in all those places where we have people. Most of rural Canada is now getting depopulated because people move on their own and they ask us to provide them with the skills to go where those jobs are. We gladly do that.

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Chair, I am very proud to be from Fort McMurray and to be a member of the third largest Newfoundland community in Canada. I have been there for 30 years. I am very proud to be part of Newfoundland in essence and proud of the people whom I have worked with over many years in that area. I think quite frankly most Newfoundlanders are proud to be living there. I find the comments quite insulting.

Notwithstanding that, I am curious as to why we do not have some form of equivalency test instead of education level requirements for overseas immigrants coming into Canada.

I would like to hear a little more on that, especially given if the work experience of that person is within a certain criteria of five or ten years. I would be very interested to hear why we do not have some sort of equivalency test instead of a grade 12 diploma or a similar manner.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, I suppose if the member who had asked me questions prior to this member would have raised that, he probably would have said that it is not up to me to do that. That is a provincial jurisdiction.

When we do an assessment of qualifications, whether they are earned on the job or in an academic institution, these assessments are done locally and we respect that jurisdiction.

Because we are talking about skill sets that are learned and earned elsewhere, I want to advise the House as well that one of my other initiatives and one of my other priorities was to bring as many students through the international student visa program in the hope that we would get many of these young men and women to become attached to our country, maybe through a particular province, through the study program and through the application of work afterwards.

That is why I indicated I would provide them all with a work visa that would last for two years, provided they came from beyond the three major cities in the country, so they could begin to develop roots on the area and then apply for permanent residency.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I would like to address several issues.

The first is visitor visa requirements for EU member states. The European Union currently has 25 member states. This now means that citizens of Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary, just to name a few, no longer require visitor visas to travel to other member states like the U.K. or Germany.

Unfortunately, citizens of seven new member countries that entered in May of last year still require visitor visas to come to Canada.

I get many calls from my constituents. Besides just tourism, their family members cannot come to Canada for weddings or in the worst case funerals. They find it especially irksome because often they are told that it is because from those countries in the past people have stayed on and worked illegally.

However, times change. At the present time because they are EU members work permits for those people are no longer required in neighbouring countries such as the U.K., Ireland or Sweden.

If they want to travel to a foreign country to work, they would probably make better wages and be a lot closer to home in countries such as the U.K.

Supply

The Minister of Citizenship and Immigration understands that the situation in Europe is in his own words constantly evolving. He is aware that Europe is expanding and with that comes new political realities. He has been reviewing this matter and it is my hope that he will announce streamlined measures for visitors from the seven new E.U. member countries such as Poland.

I was just curious at what kind of timeline we may be looking?

● (2205)

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, the member is right. The European Union is in a constant state of evolution and seems to move ever in an expansive fashion, bringing in more and more countries.

We indicated that we would do an analysis of all the criteria related to visas and to passports, the security of documentation. Once we complete that, we would make a decision. That decision would stand for about a year to two years, after which we would then re-evaluate our position. We would do that in consultation with the authorities that the Chair would know quite well, foreign affairs, international trade, CSIS, the RCMP, all those that are concerned with the security of persons and the security of documentation, to ensure that we could allow for the free flow of people, again always keeping in mind the security needs of Canadians.

However, we need to keep in mind that the relationships of the European nations one to the other really have very little bearing on their relationship with us. They have certain obligations to the Schengen agreement, but that does not apply to us. However, we take it into consideration as we do our assessment.

We hope to arrive at a normalization of visa permissions and restrictions in due course, but we will take all the appropriate considerations into balance first.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Mr. Chair, next, I would like to address measures to assist foreign trained workers.

All too often we have heard stories from friends and neighbours who have immigrated to our country about how they are disqualified from working in the field in which they were educated in their own countries. I have met many constituents who have degrees in medicine, health care and engineering, whose degrees are not recognized in Canada and could only gain employment in their area of specialty if they were to retrain at Canadian educational institutions. Having families to take care of, these highly trained immigrants often taken on menial jobs, such as driving cabs, to sustain their families, as they set aside their retraining. Over time, frustration sets in as they realize they may never work in their area of specialty in their new homeland, Canada.

This has been a longstanding problem. What has the government done to ameliorate this particular situation?

Hon. Hedy Fry (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Chair, recently, the government announced the internationally-trained worker initiative. This initiative is a comprehensive and integrated strategy in which the Government of Canada is working inter-departmentally with about 14 or 15 departments which have jurisdiction in certain areas. We are working with provinces and specific regulatory bodies. For example, with physicians, we have just set up an international

medical graduate system in which they are providing a pan-Canadian assessment model. They have a website these doctors can go to so they can assess themselves and get ready for their exams.

The Minister of Health, which is one of the departments participating, has announced \$75 million in order to help these doctors to move quickly into getting residency places specifically for foreign-trained physicians across the country. This is going to be, again, used by the provinces that are responsible for getting that training moving.

I want to quickly say that in Ontario, some of that money has been used to assess 550 physicians who are living there right now and who are foreign trained.

This is exactly what we are doing with that initiative.

● (2210)

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Mr. Chair, next I would like to address the issue of denaturalization and deportation.

The parliamentary committee on citizenship and immigration has held hearings across Canada on this issue. Although it only seems to directly affect a handful of people in Canada, it in fact affects all of us. It devalues the citizenship of all Canadians when Canadians, by choice, those who have immigrated to our country, do not have the same rights as Canadians by birth.

The existing process which allows citizenship to be removed by in-camera, secret meetings of the special committee of cabinet, runs contrary to the rules and intent of our Charter of Rights and Freedoms. When citizens' rights are taken away from them, ostensibly for crimes committed or for the safety of our society, it should only be done by a judicial process and not a political process. When people say our judicial process is too costly and too slow, I like to tell them there is a cost, but it is a cost society has to bear if it is to be a just and civil society.

It is high time that our present system of de-naturalization and deportation, a relic from pre-charter rights days, be consigned to the dusty shelves of the Library of Parliament archives.

I am sure the minister looks forward to the recommendations of the parliamentary committee on citizenship and immigration, recommendations that we hope will guarantee all Canadians, whether they are Canadian by birth or by choice, are treated equally by our laws and are treated equally before our courts.

In the minister's short term in citizenship and immigration he has moved quickly on a number of files. Could he comment on the issue I have just raised. When will a new citizenship act be forthcoming?

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, I have a particular attachment to Canadian citizenship. I value it perhaps as much as the next person and perhaps more, in part because I had to swear allegiance to Canada and acquire that citizenship.

I am proud to say that my grandfather who lived here at the turn of the 19th century was a Canadian citizen. He had been a British subject prior to that. He conferred that same status on to my mother. I would have had it had I not been born someplace else. However, the circumstances allowed me to apply for citizenship.

Supply

In terms of two levels of citizenship, we just need to take a look at some of the members here in the House right now. Six were born outside the country. Two more were second generation. Such is the value of our citizenship that those who were born elsewhere can take a seat in the House. I have been fortunate enough to be called to cabinet. I joked earlier about the shelf life of people in my position, but the fact of the matter is that this is a wonderful place that values citizenship. It allows us all the opportunity to come, to be a part of, to be shareholders this great enterprise and to be able to make some of those decisions.

How do we lose our citizenship? We lose it if we acquire it by fraudulent means. That means that we must have misrepresented the case that qualified us to be here and to become permanent residents or to acquire citizenship. I do not think anybody would suggest that if it was acquired fraudulently, that it should be retained. Does the process require a series of judicial mechanisms? Perhaps. The only way people can lose their citizenship is by misrepresenting their case. Bill C-18, a bill that died on the order paper, did have that judicial process.

When will I present another bill? It will be up to members tomorrow night I guess.

• (2215)

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij: Mr. Chair, I would like to come back to an issue that was raised earlier by a colleague and it dealt with our present point system for immigration.

Does the minister feel that perhaps our point system is working at cross purposes with CIDA? CIDA does a lot of funding of educational projects in developing countries. In those same countries, we skim off their educated elite, often beneficiaries of CIDA programs, because our point system gives priority to those who are highly educated such as doctors and engineers. These are places in the world where they seriously need doctors and engineers.

Is there any thought to changing our point system, especially when it relates to developing countries, to ensure that we are not working at cross purposes and taking professionals away from those countries that sorely need them?

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, we cannot object to those who want to come to Canada to choose a better life, no matter what their background; however, let me go to the issue of the point system.

From time to time Citizenship and Immigration Canada, in consultation with all of its other related departments, and in complete awareness, hopefully, of the conditions in Canada, will have occasion to change the point system, so that those who are invited into Canada or are in fact recruited into Canada meet the requirements that the economy dictates.

Keeping that in mind, I guess that I can say yes, the department is always looking at ways to fine tune the system, so that it reflects the needs of the moment, but that process does not happen overnight. It takes some consultation, in which we are engaged, and then we make a decision. It goes through a process itself in order to make the point system and Parliament is always engaged at the end about what we do.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij: Mr. Chair, I would like to echo the minister's sentiments that everyone should have an equal opportu-

nity. Unfortunately, the point system, in the way it is structured, does not provide for that because certain categories of people are given preference, namely those who are highly educated.

I would like to move on to another category I am concerned about. It is the category that allows people to invest in our economy amounts of \$250,000 plus. This provides a fast track method to citizenship in our country.

Are we contemplating looking at the countries from which we encourage this sort of economic migration to our country and people who have the ability to pay their way. A number of third world countries have very corrupt regimes. There is an index that lists countries according to corruption levels. Is there any thought as to whether or not we should be looking for that type of immigrant from those particular countries to be fast tracked to Canada?

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, the investment category or the business class category for immigration is not designed to give people fast track to citizenship. It is really an opportunity for people to come here and make an investment, and thereby qualify for permanent residency. Once the residency is established, the clock starts ticking as a qualification and a qualifier for citizenship.

We must always do our due diligence with respect to any of those who make an investment in the country or who bring particular skills into the country. That due diligence, with respect to those who come to make a cash investment, has to do with the accounting system we use, and we need to see that it is bona fide.

The idea of the investor category was to have people come here, make an investment and create jobs. We need to see real and legitimate money. In terms of the other skilled workers, they have to bring their talents to bear on the economy as well. We bring all of those things together. There is not a process that allows anybody to circumvent the rules that apply to everybody else.

• (2220)

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Chair, I am going to try out the opposition frontbench for this round of questioning and get the full experience of the House of Commons tonight.

A number of people have raised with the minister the question of a new Citizenship Act. We have seen three attempts by the government to bring in a new act. They were never given the kind of priority needed to actually make it through the process here in Parliament.

We have again had a request from the former minister to the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration that if we had spent time working last fall on getting some recommendations to her, that there would be a new act forthcoming in February. We know that there was a change in leadership. The current minister took over and has yet to fulfill the promise, both of the Speech from The Throne and of the former minister, to introduce that legislation.

I know that there is a common expression on that side of promises made, promises kept. When is the minister going to stand and say, promise made, promise kept on the introduction of a new Citizenship Act?

Supply

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, let me thank the hon. member for acknowledging that we are keeping the promises that we make. He did acknowledge the fact that we have done some things. In the four short months that I have been here, I have already delivered on some of the promises or priorities that I set.

One of them, by the way, is that I asked, in my capacity as minister, for the member and other members of the committee to do some of their consultations across the country on a new Citizenship Act and to send to me the recommendations that they would like to see considered in the crafting of a Citizenship Act that would come before the committee and the House.

I would like to have a forward looking picture of that possibility, but that will depend on several members in the House tomorrow night and whether or not we will be able to do it.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Chair, when the minister was talking about how proud he was to be a minister and how he had been a naturalized Canadian, I was reminded of the experience of Michael Starr, who was the first cabinet minister who was not from a French or British background in Canada. He was actually from my home town of Oshawa, Ontario. He was the minister of labour in the Diefenbaker government.

My family were immigrants to Canada. I know how proud they were of the fact that Mr. Starr was made a cabinet minister, the first immigrant cabinet minister in the sense of having a non-British or non-French background. It was indeed something that was very important to many people in Oshawa and across Canada.

We have often heard that the government is committed to an annual target for immigration of 1% of the population. We are still nowhere near that. We are almost 100,000 short of that almost every year. Yet, we keep hearing that number of 1% bandied around. Does the government have any intention of bringing in a recommendation that would get us toward its often stated target of 1% of the population for immigration?

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, I had an occasion on Friday night to meet with a group of individuals who are experts in international migration. One of them is one of our own professors at Queen's who actually devised that 1% figure.

I asked where that number of 1% came from? Does it represent the net immigrants and the net number of migration? Does it represent the net number of people we bring in minus the birth rate, death rate, et cetera? He said that it seemed like a really good number. It has become part of the mythology around which much immigration policy is developed.

I do not think I have personally ever used the 1% number, but the 1% figure, as demographers would say, is what we require in order to keep our population current and to replace ourselves. We are in the process of establishing a range target, as I indicated in an earlier answer, for Parliament to consider, but we do it on the basis of a variety of figures, including a legal market assessment in terms of the capacity to process that many people.

So far, Parliament, in its wisdom, has said the range shall be 220,000 to 240,000 or 245,000. Until we get Parliament to change that view, the 1% figure will have to wait a little longer.

● (2225)

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Chair, one of the other statistics that we hear often when we deal with immigration issues is that by 2011, all new labour force growth in Canada will come solely from immigration and that by the mid 2020s, all population growth in Canada will come solely from immigration.

I am wondering if the minister can correlate those two figures together. Are our annual targets of 220,000 or 240,000 enough to meet the 2011 situation? Does he accept that 2011 situation as impending and 2011 is not that far off? If we were to change our policy and increase our capacity to process immigration, we would need to make those adjustments soon. What are the plans of the department in that regard?

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, the member is right and I accept those figures. The challenge for us is not all immigration. I gave an indication earlier that this department is becoming much more a recruiter. It is becoming much more proactive and less of an administrative department even though it still needs to address the administrative requirements.

The reason it is not all citizenship and immigration is because those figures are also alarm bells for all government departments. They must understand the policy implications that would flow from those figures.

For example, provincial education departments around the country must be thinking about how they can meet these particular targets. If 70% of all new jobs created in the next five years are going to require post-secondary education and/or training, then why is it that we tolerate an early high school dropout rate that hovers around the 30% mark? If only 6% of all new jobs within five years are going to require less than a high school diploma, how can we tolerate the built-in structural unemployment that must be created when we have 6% of the jobs being sought after by 30% of the population? Of the 70% only 41% actually have post-secondary education.

Those challenges go across government departments and do not apply just to us. As I indicated earlier, one of my six priority items is to bring as many young men and women into our system through international student visas, so that we have the advantage of their desire and ambition to grow academically, materially and economically here in Canada.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Chair, another one of the policy decisions we often hear about is that there should be a 60-40 split in terms of 60% for economic immigrants and 40% for family class and refugees.

As the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration travelled across the country, it became increasingly apparent that there was also a divide in the happiness and ability to integrate between those two groups. The 60% of skilled immigrants are facing the terrible problems of foreign credential recognition. They were working in the fields that they got points for in the point system but are unable to work here in Canada. They are terribly frustrated and angry. We have heard from some immigrant agencies about the increasing anger and even the threat of violence in a lot of the situations where these agencies are working and how they have had to increase security precautions in their offices due to that.

Supply

At the same time we have heard the frustrations of families regarding family reunification even though we know that a lot of the people who enter Canada as part of family reunification are much happier. Families have been a great place to ensure quick integration. People are happy when they arrive here because they are being reunited with their families.

I want to ask the minister if there is any consideration being given to increasing the percentage of the split between family class and refugee immigration in recognition of the integration potential in that category and in the apparent greater happiness of the folks who immigrate under that category?

• (2230)

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, we agree that the greater the happiness of the applicants who make Canada their home, the more productive and competitive they become and make a contribution to the entire common wheel. When we talk about the 60-40 split, and Parliament in its wisdom considers how that will be determined, we are conscious of course of the fact that the mix must invariably change.

In an earlier question one of my colleagues asked what would happen to the parent and grandparent category and whether it would go up or down? As long as we maintain the kinds of mixes that the member has identified of 60-40, one cannot help but think that the backlog in the family class will constantly go up. One only has to figure out the numbers. It is going to happen. It has nothing to do with bad service. It has nothing to do with bad administration. It has nothing to do with disinterested employees. It has everything to do with the way the numbers operate.

Parliament will have to consider in the mix whether it should be 60-40, whether the 60 should drop or rise or whether the 40 should drop or rise. In that context, we also have to take a look at the mix within the 40 and 60 and whether we are going to increase the range from the 220,000 or 240,000 and, perhaps as the member indicated earlier, bring it closer to the 1% mark, which is about 300,000. We will be looking at ranges and percentages within ranges as well.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Chair, I think it also has to do with the expectations that we raise among potential immigrants when we give them points for certain skills and education that are not fulfilled when they get to Canada, and also the promises we make about the possibilities of family reunification. Our policy needs to be in line with both those expectations and the promises we make that there is potential for reuniting with their families when they immigrate to Canada as skilled workers.

I want to ask about the private sponsorship program. We have heard tonight about refugee programs and how Canada is the envy of the world in refugee matters. Certainly the private sponsorship program has been one of those programs that has led to the reputation that Canada does have. In fact the United Nations Nansen medal was awarded to Canada largely because of the private sponsorship program.

There is a backlog of 12,000 applications in that program. The target is 3,000 to 4,000 a year. I do not think we met this in the past year. It is causing a lot of frustration among the potential sponsors in that program. These are people who are highly motivated to assist in refugee settlement and who are willing to take responsibility in an

incredibly significant fashion to do that important work. It has been shown to be an incredibly successful way of ensuring the integration of refugees into Canadian society.

I wonder if the minister could explain what measures he is taking to end that backlog, especially given the fact that he has talked about how the number of refugees coming to Canada seems to be reduced, both by interdiction at airports overseas when people are moving toward Canada and also by the safe third country agreement.

It seems that we have managed to somehow reduce the number of refugees who have managed to get to Canada. Sometimes I think that the department and the minister seem to trumpet that as a good news story. I suspect for the people who are languishing in refugee camps or who are separated from family members who are still in refugee camps or in less than stellar situations, having fled conflict in the world, that interdiction and safe third country are not necessarily the best news stories around for them.

I am wondering what measures are being taken to ensure that the private sponsorship program continues to function and that the folks who are willing to participate in it get that opportunity soon.

• (2235)

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, the Government of Canada values all of those men and women and those organizations which, through their altruism, are manifestations of those values that are typically Canadian as they sponsor many of these refugees.

There has been a problem, and I acknowledge that. In part it is because many of those who have made application for landing as refugees have not always met the criteria. There are many who have been identified as ineligible. I hate to give examples but I do it for illustrative purposes and I do not mean to tarnish anyone by it, but it is quite understandable that some of the current refugees are hoping that through private sponsorship they can get some of their relatives in, their next of kin. While that may be a legitimate objective on their part, it really does not fit the criteria of the private sponsorship of refugees.

What we have already planned for this year is a tripartite conference, including the Government of Canada, NGOs, private sponsors and the UNHCR in an effort to try to build the kinds of criteria and acceptance of criteria by all partners so that we can have a better outcome.

The other thing we have to keep in mind is that in many places where we would have some of the very legitimate applicants for refugees, we do have logistical problems that have nothing to do with us but are all indigenous to the territory, such as, the post office, other methods of collecting data and getting people from point A to point B. We are working on that and that is why we need to have the UNHCR involved.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski (Oak Ridges—Markham, Lib.): Mr. Chair, we live in an age of migration. People from many different cultures with many different beliefs and a wide range of backgrounds and skills are on the move from one part of the globe to another. More and more people want to seek out the best possible country in which to live. They want to choose their home.

Supply

As such, Canada has increasingly become the destination of choice for many people, such as it was for me and my family over 30 years ago. As a matter of fact, I come from a little village of 300 families in Macedonia called Brajcin. In Toronto itself there are now over 400 families, over 1,200 people, from that one little village.

Over the last 20 years, Canada has witnessed an unprecedented period of sustained high levels of immigration. Since the 1980s Canada has admitted more than 4.5 million immigrants, with 236,000 newcomers in 2004 alone. As a result, there is an increased demand for Canadian citizenship. Clearly, there are several reasons to explain this increase.

We have had high immigration levels in the early 2000s, more than 225,000 per year. We know that about 80% of Canadian permanent residents apply for citizenship after living here for three years. As well, since the permanent resident card became mandatory for travelling on commercial carriers, many long term permanent residents are applying for citizenship.

Our neighbours to the south now require more from permanent residents of Canada when they seek admission than before. Additionally, some countries, such as India, have modified their policies on dual nationalities. Finally, there are those individuals who are simply seeking to solidify their relationship with Canada. They want to formally express their allegiance to our country and become Canadian.

We value those newcomers to Canada as they not only contribute to our cultural mosaic, but also help to make Canada more prosperous and internationally competitive.

We know that the minister and those before him have initiated measures to improve citizenship processing times. However, it appears that more is required. Could the minister tell us what he has done to ensure that individuals who want to become citizens of our country or who need proof of Canadian citizenship can have their request processed in a timely manner?

● (2240)

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, I am delighted to answer that question. We have about 170,000 brand new requests for citizenship every year. We have a very large number of applications for proofs of citizenship.

I indicated that in order to do this job properly, we need to have modern equipment and modern processes in place in order to respond expeditiously. All of that takes money. We have put in \$69 million over the next two years in order to reduce the processing time. That \$69 million does not go just for machinery. It does not go just toward putting people in place to process the files. It goes toward ensuring that justice, CSIS and the RCMP have the appropriate personnel in place to conduct the requisite checks and make the appropriate decisions that go with processing applications.

All of those funds do not go simply to Citizenship and Immigration Canada. They go to all of those other agencies that are important players in ensuring that when we accord citizenship it goes to the applicant who is one we would want as a shareholder in this great nation.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Mr. Chair, have any countries shown an interest in studying the Canadian immigration system? We are known around the world as having one of the best immigration systems.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, all countries are showing interest in our system. We are one of four countries in the world that actually has an open system. My good colleague and friend from Thunder Bay is asking me to answer the question. The answer is yes.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Mr. Chair, as I mentioned earlier, I came to Canada in 1968 with my mom and my brother. My father had come previously.

Increasingly, people are coming to Canada and are separated from their families. Perhaps the minister could tell us what we are doing in terms of uniting families or decreasing the length of time it takes for families to reunite. We were separated from my father for four years. Now that I am in Ottawa for five days each week, my wife and I see each other on the weekends. It is intolerable to be separated these days. Yet my parents were separated for five years and I was separated from my father.

Things have changed. Is it a trend that people are intolerant of being separated from their families? What is it that is going on?

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, I want to reassure my hon. colleague that we have a very high intolerance level for division when it comes to families. That is why spouses and children get first priority. In fact we process nearly 60% of all the cases within six months of application. That is quite quick. We are trying to make that 100% but we have not yet achieved that.

We are trying to be as innovative as we can. We have the multiple entry visa system in order to bring parents and grandparents into the country immediately. We have increased the number of parents and grandparents that we would land immediately. I indicated earlier on the measures that we took with out of status spouses.

We did something similar as well with the Vietnamese who are finding themselves stateless in the Philippines. We thought that those families who had been separated for so many years needed to have an opportunity to get back in. One of the very first things we did after I entered the department as minister is we took steps to ensure that Canada would stretch out our welcoming arms to those as well, so that we could end that sorry tale of human tragedy.

● (2245)

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Mr. Chair, I would like to ask the minister another question in terms of applications for visitors to Canada.

We do not accept about 130,000 to 150,000 applications for visitors to Canada, but I understand we have over 96 million visitors in Canada as well. Has this number increased in the last four to five years due to security issues since 9/11? Was that one of the factors for refusing a larger number of applicants, or is that not a factor in the decision to refuse applicants who come to Canada as visitors?

We could definitely use the revenues that they bring to Canada. If we just halved the number, we could fly 75,000 more people into Canada. Probably all 75,000 of them would go to the CN Tower and Niagara Falls and so on. It would be good for the Canadian economy. Perhaps the minister could shed some light on that.

Supply

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, I think we are all beginning to get an appreciation of how broad is the breadth of the application of Citizenship and Immigration Canada. Yes, we are very much engaged with Industry Canada and the tourism commission in order to ensure that we are part and parcel of any plans they might have.

As an example, the member will know that for the Prime Minister's recent visit to China, which resulted in China indicating Canada as a destination of choice, by some estimates it will probably result in between 70,000 and 150,000 additional tourists from China alone coming to Canada on an annual basis. This means that we have had to put greater resources into dealing with many of the applications, not only from China but from elsewhere.

To answer the member's question as well with respect to security, certainly 9/11 did change people's perceptions about what happens in some parts of the world especially. What we needed to do was put in place the kind of official who would be sensitive to some of those concerns so that we could provide Canadians with a sense of comfort that those who come to visit here do come here as genuine tourists and do not come here because they want to do some malfeasance.

I am not sure that this is accounted for greatly in the backlog, but we are looking at some of the structural or framed developments in each of these refusals so that we can identify them. For example, among one particular community we are taking a look at those who come here for religious reasons to see what kinds of parameters we can put in place that go beyond the experience we currently have. We are trying to reassess the parameters under which our officials make decisions locally in the executing of these visas.

For example, the refusal rate also is dependent on another measure, which I indicated a moment ago. When we accord to parents and grandparents the opportunity to come here on multiple entry visas, we will eliminate a sizable number of refusals of visits to come here on the occasions of weddings and funerals and other celebrations.

For all of these together over the course of the last several months, the department has put together a plan that gives us an opportunity to individualize some of these issues, but I hearken and I hasten to add that we had some 850,000 accepted applications for tourist visas last year. That is an impressive number: 850,000 people who came through our missions just so they could come and visit and say, "What a lovely place, even in Vancouver".

• (2250)

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Mr. Chair, this short question is my last one. I know that when the minister was first elected he represented many of the people from the Italian community in his riding. Many of them went to him for assistance for visitor visas and immigration issues.

Being the first Macedonian born member of Parliament, I have many people from all over the GTA coming to me. I would like to find out if there is any regionalization of refusal or are there any certain areas of the world from which we would refuse more people? There is some discussion in some communities that there is some sort of a dislike for this country or that one, or for this part of the world or that.

I know it is not true for the Macedonian community, but maybe the minister could tell us if there is any profiling such as that of any specific geographical area in the world.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, we have some very highly trained local officials. Their first order of business, as I have said, is to make sure that everything fits within the Canadian interest context. They deal with every application on a case by case basis, so in terms of profiling, as the member puts it, no, it does not happen. In terms of any one mission being more negative or more positive than another, no, it is case by case according to the needs of the Canadian domestic environment.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, CPC): Mr. Chair, I will be splitting my time with the member for Vegreville—Wainwright.

I thank the minister for being here this evening.

As a member of the House who has been fortunate enough to come to this country as a refugee, I learned about the process at that time, when my family came to Canada in the early 1970s.

It is obvious that the immigration system, in keeping up with some of the challenges, has gone through some difficult times. My family, like many others, came here as proud refugees. Very few countries, as we know, would allow a family like mine to have their son serve in the federal Parliament. I think that says a remarkable thing about our country and our values. That said, we are obviously facing huge challenges today. I know that in the work he is doing the minister is trying to address much of this.

I have served as an MP for almost eight years now. My office has had continuous problems when it comes to visas, especially in trying to get visitor visas. We have had continuous problems with people being rejected when trying to get these particular visas. Different solutions have been brought forward.

It is all very painful for people who are trying to reunify their families, even for a short time, to try to expedite the process of getting a visa for their family to come for an event, whatever it might be, and then return home to their countries. I am continuously finding myself in very difficult situations because of how many constituents continuously get their families rejected in the process. I would like the minister to briefly comment on that.

As I travel around the country, I find that many Canadians come to me about these issues, especially as I am a member of an ethnic community, because if they are from a South Asian community or a Muslim community or whatever it might be, they at times feel a little more comfortable talking to someone they can relate to in talking about their problems. I find this happening quite often as I travel across the country.

One of the key issues that comes up, and I know the minister is well aware of it, is the issue of foreign credentials. I continuously hear from many people that after all the time we have been discussing this issue, and after some initiatives have been put in place to try to deal with this issue, there still seems to be no identified process or national consistency for the recognition of international credentials and experience by most professional and trade bodies in Canada.

Supply

As well, those processes that are in place often lack clarity and are costly. There is often a gap between information provided to skilled immigrant applicants before and during the immigration process and their actual opportunity to use their skills and training equivalency here in the Canadian workforce.

In the last federal budget, I believe \$20 million was allocated toward this issue and other amounts were allocated in previous budgets. Here is what I would like to know from the minister, if possible. How, where and by whom was this money spent? What has been the value for this money? It is a significant amount. What more will be done to alleviate this problem? From what I hear from people across the country, it still seems to be a constant problem.

• (2255)

Hon. Hedy Fry: Actually, Mr. Chair, there is a process in place. We must consider that the whole issue of internationally trained workers is a multiple jurisdictional issue. There are provinces, unions, regulatory bodies and universities and colleges involved. I think what we have come up with as a federal government is the taking on of a leadership role even though not all of these are our jurisdictions.

We have just announced an internationally trained worker initiative. It is made up of a series of policies that are interwoven and integrated in order to work specifically with credential recognition bodies across the country. They are all looking now at a pan-Canadian assessment model, whether they are engineers, nurses or doctors. The doctors have already put theirs in place. The nurses are ready to go with theirs. The engineers have just been funded to do theirs. This is going on.

We work with sector councils that are going to help us look at the non-regulated workers in other areas such as the restaurant industry, et cetera. Industry Canada is working on some of those initiatives with them.

We are working with the unions to look at some of the issues of either the unskilled workers or the skilled union workers. The unions are now prepared to work with us to help to train them.

We know that there are a couple of things that form barriers. One of them is recognition of credentials. That is why we are working on this. The other one, in some instances, is language training and that is why Citizenship and Immigration Canada, as one of the departments participating, has put up \$20 million a year for that kind of technical and enhanced language training.

We also know that bridge to work, that is, not having Canadian experience, is a huge beast. Human Resources and Skills Development Canada has been looking at putting money forward in bridge to work initiatives.

Health Canada has been doing it for the human health resources sector. We recently announced money to allow for foreign trained physicians to be able to move into the system, be assessed on line and get residency programs to get them to move forward. We are doing the same with nurses. Currently we are working with pharmacists.

Now we are working with the business sector, where the private sector needs to be able to get that bridge to work. The private sector

people are working with Industry Canada. They are working with Health Canada on pharmacists. They are working with Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. They are working with ACOA.

There are about 15 departments that are currently working with us and we are working with the provinces and municipalities and all of those bodies. In fact, it is working quite well, surprisingly, because everyone seems to be on side and wanting to make it happen.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: Mr. Chair, I would like to address the issue of the credibility of estimates, because I think it is no surprise that the department has been under a cloud of suspicion since the last minister left. There were a lot of problems leading up to her resignation.

Currently we have a minister who in my opinion has deliberately taken steps to hurt the ethnic communities and individuals of those communities since becoming the immigration minister. I will give some examples.

On March 13, he warned members of the Sikh community in Toronto not to criticize the Liberal government. He said, "Keep it inside the family". He attacked the Jewish publisher of the *Western Standard* magazine for publishing a satirical poster comparing the Liberal Party to criminals. He then went on to accuse the Conservative Party of being Ku Klux Klan related. He made deliberate comments about an MP from Newton—North Delta who happens to be a Conservative MP and Sikh. Then, last Friday, there was information leaked from his department that directly is an abuse of his own role in violation of the Privacy Act.

With these numerous instances, all of which should have led to his resignation or the Prime Minister firing him, how are Canadians supposed to trust him on these estimates?

The Chair: Does the minister want to answer that? It has to do with the estimates only in the last word. It is really pushing the envelope.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, there is a certain amount of civility in this place and I do not want to descend to those same depths that I just saw happen.

If we want to talk about estimates, the estimates are there for everybody to discuss. I have been here to answer all of the questions related to the estimates. If people want to deviate from that, there is an opportunity to do it in another environment.

I appreciate the opportunity to say that the estimates and the examination thereof are a valuable democratic exercise. It is too bad that not everybody takes up the opportunity to look at them.

• (2300)

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Chair, the lack of civility in this place has been caused by that minister and the comments he made that were referred to by my colleague were completely out of line. He should have resigned and he should still resign.

Supply

I will talk about what I have seen in my 12 years as a member of Parliament. I was first elected in 1993. At that time, we had an immigration system that was functioning quite well in many areas, but had its problems. Twelve years later our system is much worse in every area than it was back then. Yet we have had minister after minister stand up and make statements like the minister has made all night, statements that sound grand and great and that everything will get better. Hon. members can understand my frustration with 12 years of hearing ministers make those same kinds of statements. That is frustrating.

The best demonstration that the system has got worse, and members of Parliament on all sides knows this, is that in every one of our offices, even in a rural constituency like mine, more and more of the time of my staff is spent dealing with problems that should be dealt with by the minister's department.

I do not blame the employees of the immigration department. The minister and the government are to blame because they have not provided the resources and they have not provided law and rules that allow the system to work better.

I have a centre in Vegreville—Wainwright in the town of Vegreville. Those employees make that system work and the place work in spite of the difficult situation they are put in by the government. That simply is not acceptable.

The MPs offices are not supposed to be doing work that should rightfully and correctly be done by the minister's department. That simply has to change. We do this work because every one of us as members of Parliament wants to make the immigration system work.

I do not think there is a member of Parliament in the House who does not understand the importance of immigration to our country, to our communities. Out of desperation to make a broken system work, a system which has deteriorated more and more over the 12 years I have been here, we do what we have to do. We have our staff do what we have to do to just make it work in some fashion.

I want to get to a situation in my constituency. I often get people coming to our office who have had difficulty getting their parents and grandparents into the country. We were having a particularly large number of problems in this area, so back in November, my staff phoned one of the major offices in the country. There are some very good people inside the department who help our staff. We had several of these cases in a row. There was one situation where a family desperately tried to get their parents into the country, but nothing seemed to be happening. They were at the point where they were to be charged the fee again because of the department's delay in processing their application.

Department delays go beyond the time limit for medical checks, security checks and that kind of thing, so the fee is charged again, due to the breakdown in the work of the department. This family was coming up to one of these deadlines. My staff phoned the department and finally an employee, and I will not name him nor say from which office he is, said very candidly that sponsoring parents and grandparents was a zero priority with the government. That was the exact term he used.

I asked a question about this in the House back in November. I got no answer at all from the minister at that time. That is the kind of

thing we are facing. Bringing parents and grandparents into our country is a zero priority. In other words, do not even both trying.

The Liberals claims they have fixed it. Forgive me for doubting that when I have seen for 12 years these same kinds of promises being made. Forgive me for doubting that they will fix it now, because they will not. The only thing that will fix the system is a change of government. It has come to that.

● (2305)

We can stand here tonight and listen again. We have had immigration ministers in these kinds of committees before. We can stand here all night, ask these questions and get no answers from the minister of any substance. He keeps saying things are great. They are not great. They are not going to be fixed by the government.

The minister should have resigned because of the comments he made. That is a demonstration of the lack of goodwill on the part of the government. We have to replace the government. That is the bottom line.

I really would like to ask some questions. I know my time is limited. I do not know if there is any point actually. I came here tonight intending to ask short questions so I would get short answers, but it is not going to happen. Therefore, in the two minutes I have, I will make some more comments.

One of the most common problems we have in our office is citizens, constituents, who marry outside the country and then want to bring their spouses, their husbands or wives, into our country. I heard the minister say awhile ago that 60% were processed within six months or something. I do not believe him because it does not happen. From all of my colleagues who I have talked to about this, it just does not fit. Six months is some number the Liberals have made up. They have it fudged somehow because that simply is not the case.

How cruel and uncaring on the part of the government, when a husband and wife are separated such as people in my constituency and in some cases for years because the government cannot do its job. It is not because they are a security risk or they have health problems. It is nothing like that. The government will not put the rules in place and will not give the resources to the good people we have working in our immigration departments. That is why it is not working.

Again, there is no use asking questions. We have to replace the government and we will do that as soon as we can.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Chair, this summer will mark the 25th anniversary of the arrival in Canada of the first group of refugees fleeing the Communist regime that had just taken control of Vietnam.

The sight of tens of thousands of refugees on makeshift wooden boats is something that many of us will never forget. Their suffering changed lives and forced us to act. Today, this same spirit of compassion and concern for others burns as brightly in the hearts of all Canadians.

We were all deeply moved by the suffering of these families from Vietnam or the Philippines, by the many stories of absent loved ones, and by the hope of reuniting those family members here in this great country.

Family reunification is extremely important, both to me and—I am certain—all of government. When we consider the situation of these families in their native land compared their family members here, it is very important for us to try to reunite these families and give them every opportunity to live together and in harmony.

When we look at an example as ordinary as a birth in the family which, as members are aware, happened to me in recent weeks, we see even more the importance of reuniting family members and ensuring that people can work, be together and love those near to them.

Naturally, for many new arrivals the government brings to Canada, families are an anchor and a source of energy for the future. Families also represent more solid bases for the health and future of communities and nations, whatever they may be.

Another example is that of my riding. We very recently set up a program, the Programme de carrefour d'immigration rurale, to be sure we integrate people from other countries, those who have recently arrived.

We set up a system to be sure to use new approaches, to show Canadians here how we can welcome new arrivals and reunite families at the same time.

We must therefore ensure that the family class remains a vital element, an integral part of Canada's immigration program.

I am extremely proud that the Government of Canada accepted many of the 2,000 Vietnamese still living in the Philippines, who may find close relatives here. It is good news for everyone.

That said, I believe we can all accept that the job will not be easy. Some applicants may lack sufficient and appropriate proof of identity. I know the minister has worked hard with the appropriate intervenors, such as SOS Viet Phi.

My question this evening is as follows. Are the measures intended to help the people in question come to Canada progressing and when may we expect the first families to arrive?

• (2310)

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, my colleague just asked a very good question. However, before I answer him I want to say a few words in English to respond to the statements made by the Conservative member.

[English]

Today is May 18. The member indicated he had asked the question in November regarding family reunification and did not receive answer. I guess he must have missed the announcements I made with respect to inland out of status spousal applications to reunite families. That applied to approximately 3,000 inland families resident in Canada.

We made an announcement with respect to parents and grandparents. He does not think it involved any numbers, but it actually

Supply

increased the numbers from 6,000 to 18,000 this year and from 6,000 to 18,000 next year. In addition to that, we put at the disposal of all people who did not fit into the group of 18,000 for this year and next year the possibility to join their families in Canada with the use of a multiple entry visa.

That might not seem like an act to the member opposite, but it is an implemented policy, not a promise or an indication of what might happen. It has already taken place.

[Translation]

Now, to get back to my colleague's very good question on those who were victims of a terrible tragedy during the last century. I am referring to Vietnamese nationals, some 2,000 Vietnamese who are still living in the Philippines out-of-status. In other words, the UN has not registered them as refugees.

We have set up a program to welcome them here in Canada, if they have a relative willing to sponsor them. We made sure to broaden the definition of family member in order to accommodate as many of these people as possible. We are working in cooperation with three other countries to help the 2,000 Vietnamese who are still out-of-status.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Mr. Chair, I have been told that the Canadian government, that Canada, could have and should have acted sooner to solve this problem. According to some members, the Government of Canada ought to do more still by expanding the family category permanently.

I have listened with interest to the two points of view that have been expressed on this. To my knowledge, neither the international community nor the United Nations High Commission for Refugees has deemed the Vietnamese population in the Philippines to be in need of protection by resettlement.

Normally it is up to the UNHCR and the appropriate host country to determine whether or not the people in question are refugees. They did so in this instance, and determined that the 2,000 Vietnamese in question were not.

Nevertheless, the Government of Canada agreed to help by allowing those who had close relatives in Canada to be sponsored immigrants. Could, or should, Canada have done more to help this group of people? How many will be able to qualify under the Canadian criteria that are set out in the new policy?

• (2315)

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, we were asked to accommodate a certain number of individuals. A potential 150 cases were identified, which might involve 297 people, but we are not certain that all those in this category would want to come here, because the U.S., Australia and Norway are also involved in this program.

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As a result, we have indicated that we are prepared to take in more people if it is possible. Judging from the initial indications, however, obtained from members of the community, it would seem that some 200 people will be coming to Canada under this program. Should there be others, we will be able to take the necessary steps to process them, but at present there are no indications that this will be the case.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Mr. Chair, I have one last question. I gathered from the minister that there is enormous collaboration among various countries in order to meet needs when certain situations arise affecting individuals.

Could the minister indicate if the Government of Canada will continue this collaboration and these partnerships? We know that partnership is a key to successfully negotiating the process here in Canada and also throughout the world. Can the minister indicate whether we will maintain such partnerships, should such situations occur, to ensure that the needs of these people are met?

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, we always try to build on our successes. These partnerships are one indication of the success we can achieve. We always want to ensure that any success is shared by all.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Forseth (New Westminster—Coquitlam, CPC): Mr. Chair, I will be splitting my time with our immigration critic.

Change begins with the recognition that a problem exists and what I have heard often tonight is that the minister is often a system defender rather than being the helpful change agent that I would really like to hear him be.

We have consumers, applicants or whatever we want to call them who pay a lot of money and yet they still have to adjust to the administrative system. Therefore people serve the system or the bureaucracy, instead of the other way around, where we are trying to serve people. We have that data in my constituency office and in every constituency office across the country.

I remember talking to the former minister of citizenship and immigration when she first was going to be appointed. She was very optimistic about what she could do as a minister because she had a constituency office in an urban riding with a high percentage of immigrants. She said that the work in the constituency office was something like 90% immigration. So she was very sensitized to that.

What happened to her and my conversations with her as the time changed and the senior administrators got hold of her and began to say that she could not do this and could not do that? Her optimism and her commitment to change seemed to disappear.

Eighty per cent of the work in my constituency office is immigration related. I certainly do not troll for it or ask for it but it is an expectation. People are knocking on the door and I see myself as the ombudsman of last resort. We try to get people to communicate with the department but in so many cases the department just cannot communicate with its own clients. It is a bureaucracy, as I said in my opening comments, which people who have to be served by this system cannot interact with.

We know it is certainly an overly complex system. We put in a new regime of legislation just a few years ago and we are still

working the bugs out. I think the experience we are having with that new legislation needs to be adjusted because it really is not serving people the way I would like to see it.

Was it not the present minister who said publicly that if only he could become the immigration minister he would make the changes? I recall hearing those words from him. The talk around here was that he wanted to become the immigration minister and it was reported in the press. I am hoping that with that energy the immigration minister will begin delivering on this kind of system change and be the system change agent.

I am wondering if he will abandon the quota system. What quotas? We have all kinds of quotas and they are quotas by resources. It is often very discriminatory.

I have watched a succession of ministers and it just does not seem that the system improves, even though there is always a new program, a new review and now I hear about a six point plan.

If, in some circumstances, the department is shutting the door, it should do it honestly. Quit selling tickets on the airplane when the airplane is already full, is the example in that case. We are still advertising and saying that we are an open society and we want immigrants to come here but we do not have the resources or the capacity to deliver what we are saying to the international community. We take the people's money but we do not process the file.

I do not want to malign the department. I think the people are doing the best they can but we have observed a lack of administrative leadership and there are real problems.

What I have heard from the minister tonight so far is that everything is fine, that perhaps we can do a little better if we work just a little harder, we have a six point plan and all the rest of it. We have heard that all before.

My other colleague became a little excited and emotional in his comments but that represents a real concern that we want the minister and the department to succeed because if they do then Canada succeeds. Ministers and governments come and go but the department will there. Canada will still have an open face to the world and we need to do better than what we have been doing.

● (2320)

I will try and ask him a couple of specific questions. In view of the independent applicants, for instance, the lineup at Beijing, what is the current waiting list number? How long does it take for an applicant in Beijing to get the first interview? By when will the department resource that location, so that applicants will receive an interview within one year of the application?

I know that we are way off that standard at this point, but I am specifically asking about Beijing and the time limits. What is the backlog and how long will it take to get it down to the one year limit as it relates to getting an interview in Beijing?

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Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, I want to repeat what I said earlier, we have put some resources in budget 2005. Some \$100 million for service delivery. That would result in better client service and apply, as well, to some of the resources in the call centres that we have, so that they are more client centred. It includes the portal that we would make available that would make people much more aware of both the department and what it does.

With respect to what we have been doing, I repeat again what I said on my occasions this evening, we have a levels plan that is tabled in the House every November and every member has an opportunity to have input.

However, the facts of life are that we have been very fortunate to have the demand exceed the supply or the levels. That speaks to the success of Canada. It does not necessarily mean that the system is wrong. We have had tremendous success and we constantly try to improve.

I have been characterized as a critic of the department in the past. I do not think anybody is ever going to point out that I wanted this job. I used to have a fairly senior portfolio when I was asked to take this one. I was quite happy where I was. I am happy now because I am not a defender of the department; I am actually someone who is working with departmental officials in the realization of all those goals and objectives that Canadians have identified through their parliamentary plan. Are we making some headway? I would like the member to acknowledge that over the course of these last four months we have put forward some initiatives that everybody would have applauded. I am not asking for plaudits but I, on behalf of the department, accept them.

With respect to the other questions regarding Beijing, I would like to answer each one of those specifically, and I will accept them in writing and return them in writing.

● (2325)

Mr. Paul Forseth: Mr. Chair, my comment about the quota relates to resourcing because we know that an FTE, a staff member, a professional, can only handle approximately so many files in a year, and the department knows that. It makes that planning based on that.

However, when year after year our source points are tested by applicants, one would think that at some point there would be some kind of service demand relation that the department would respond to the kind of demand that it was getting out there in the field. If it does not do that, then it is artificially, by budget, setting a quota. This is what I have been seeing going on year after year at Beijing.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Chair, the fact of the matter is that we are resourced to meet the levels that are outlined by Parliament. That has

been the case ever since I have been here for 17 years. The levels are set by Parliament and then Parliament sets out the resources to ensure that the department can meet those resources. As I said, we have had demand exceed the positions available and so we will have to deal with those issues.

However, I want to give some good news, if it has not come out yet. About 80% of all spousal applications, for example, are done within 12 months. It is not fast enough, but it is pretty darned good. About 72% of temporary resident visas are issued within two days and 72% of student applications are finalized within 28 days. These are measures of a department that is actually meeting performance criteria set independently of its own mission.

So, not everything is bad. We acknowledge that we are making progress toward another level. That is already a reflection that we are our own critics, as we move forward. However, it is important to understand that we are moving forward.

The Chair: The hon. member for Calgary—Nose Hill has one minute if she wants to wrap up this discussion.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy: Mr. Chair, I am sure everyone is desolate that I only have one minute, but I would like to say not to the minister but to the whole House that this is a disappointing process. We spent four hours here and I did not notice even one specific answer.

We have a lot of wisdom in the House. There are many people who have a great deal of experience and a lot of heart for the immigration system. Yet tonight there were a lot of platitudes and very little specifics. I think it is a shame. Specific questions were asked and specific issues were raised, but other than some adept violin playing, there was very little in the way of a real exchange of specific, positive and helpful ideas.

We need to re-examine the whole system of committee of the whole, Mr. Chair. We have to make this work for Canadians better than it did tonight.

● (2330)

The Chair: It being 11:30 p.m. all votes are deemed to have been reported pursuant to Standing Order 81(4). The committee will rise and I will now leave the chair.

(All Citizenship and Immigration votes reported)

The Deputy Speaker: The House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 11:30 p.m.)

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