



CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 140 • NUMBER 105 • 1st SESSION • 38th PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, May 31, 2005
(Part A)

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

CONTENTS

(Table of Contents appears at back of this issue.)

All parliamentary publications are available on the
"Parliamentary Internet Parlementaire" at the following address:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca>

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, May 31, 2005

The House met at 10 a.m.

[English]

Prayers

•(1000)

[English]

COMMISSIONER OF OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

The Deputy Speaker: I have the honour pursuant to section 66 of the Official Languages Act to lay upon the table the annual report of the Commissioner of Official Languages, in both official languages, covering the period from April 1, 2004 to March 31, 2005.

[Translation]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(f), this report is deemed to have been permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

•(1005)

[English]

CANADA FOUNDATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT TECHNOLOGY

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Natural Resources and pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), I am pleased to table, in both official languages, the 2004 corporate plan summary of the Canada Foundation for Sustainable Development Technology.

* * *

[Translation]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 10th report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade on the United Nations oil for food scandal investigation.

HEALTH

Ms. Bonnie Brown (Oakville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 12th report of the Standing Committee on Health. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and a motion adopted by the committee on Thursday, May 19, your committee recommends that Health Canada initiate a campaign to ensure compliance with the Tobacco Act.

GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND ESTIMATES

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates. The committee has studied the supplementary estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2006, and has agreed to report them without amendment.

* * *

PETITIONS

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition with respect to an organization called STAND Canada, Students Taking Action Now: Darfur. Between March 16 and April 7 they put together signatures from universities across the country and from various high school campuses as well. The petitioners call upon Canada and the Government of Canada to take a leadership role in Darfur by broadening the AU mandate, gathering international support for the African Union, bringing criminals to justice at the ICC, and considering intervention with like-minded states.

MARRIAGE

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition on behalf of a number of Canadians, including petitioners from my own riding of Mississauga South, on the subject matter of marriage. The petitioners would like to draw to the attention of the House that the majority of Canadians believe that the fundamental matters of social policy should be decided by elected members of Parliament and not by the unelected judiciary.

Supply

The petitioners also wish to point out that it is the duty of Parliament to ensure that marriage is defined as Canadians wish it to be defined. Therefore, the petitioners would like to call upon Parliament to use all possible administrative and legislative means, 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 woman to the exclusion of all others.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

● (1010)
[English]

SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—GOMERY COMMISSION

Mr. Gary Lunn (Saanich—Gulf Islands, CPC) moved:

That this House call on the Government to amend section (k) of the Gomery Commission's terms of reference to allow the Commissioner to name names and assign responsibility.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Battlefords—Lloydminster.

I am pleased to rise today to speak to our first Conservative opposition day motion in what is coming up to a couple of months now. Although we would have liked to have had one sooner, I can assure the House that we are here to work, to ensure that democracy is upheld and to continue to do the business of the House.

I would like to read for members the motion that would change section (k) of the Gomery commission's terms of reference:

That this House call on the Government to amend section (k) of the Gomery Commission's terms of reference to allow the Commissioner to name names and assign responsibility.

For the benefit of those who are not familiar with section (k) of the Gomery commission's terms of reference, the current wording states:

—the Commissioner be directed to perform his duties without expressing any conclusion or recommendation regarding the civil or criminal liability of any person or organization and to ensure that the conduct of the inquiry does not jeopardize any ongoing criminal investigation or criminal proceedings;....

Because of the current wording, there is some ambiguity about whether Justice Gomery has the ability to name names or organizations responsible for the ad scam.

We want to make it absolutely crystal clear so that there is no ambiguity. We want to ensure that he can deliver a report on what went wrong in terms of process, but more important, recommend changes and also ensure that if there are people who should be further investigated this will be done. It is critically important that at

the conclusion of Justice Gomery's commission people are held to account and will suffer consequences.

It is of some concern that under the current terms of reference the commissioner is directed to perform his duties "without expressing any conclusion or recommendation". That is our concern. We want to make this crystal clear. I know that the government's response has been that under the current wording he now has the ability to assign responsibility and name names. If that in fact is the case the government members should support this motion, because this just really confirms that.

By almost any measurement, with the money involved and the depth of the corruption in ad scam, with the involvement of senior activists, the sponsorship scandal is the worst scandal in Canadian history. We owe it to Canadians to use every available tool to get to the bottom of what happened and punish those responsible.

Members opposite are fond of saying that we should let the commission do its work. I agree. The problem is that the limitations of section (k) in the current Gomery commission could prevent Justice Gomery from completing his task. It is arguable, and I acknowledge this, that the government would say this is already there. If the government truly believes that, then it will have no problem in supporting our motion because it removes any ambiguity.

It is the Liberals who have established a \$1 million taxpayer funded war room in the PCO to help reduce the damaging daily testimony from the Gomery commission. When we see the actions of the government and when it sets up a war room to spin its way out of this using taxpayers' money, one has to question what its motives are and where it is going. Political parties set up war rooms. Governments do not.

Let us imagine the current Prime Minister, days after the commission started, taking a million dollars of taxpayers' money to set up a war room to do damage control for the Liberal Party. It goes from bad to worse. The Liberals just do not learn. Political parties spinning a story using taxpayers' money is absolutely unacceptable. That is exactly what they are doing. That party across the way does not need a wire brush. Those members need to finally acknowledge and make a commitment to the truth.

Let us look at what has happened over the past 10 years. We have had information about what has been going on in the program, yet nothing has ever happened. Let us look a few of the facts.

● (1015)

In 1995 a memo from Public Works warned that the program was seriously flawed but nothing was ever done. In 1999 the Treasury Board Secretariat warned that Groupaction was charging exorbitant amounts of money for work that was never done and yet there was no response from the government.

In 2002 an internal audit at Public Works showed that the sponsorship was not being properly tracked. Nothing was done. Worse than nothing, a new agency was created to run the program which had even fewer financial controls.

Supply

In 2002 the Prime Minister, then minister of finance, received a letter from the Liberal national policy chair stating that there were “persistent and growing rumours that funds from the sponsorship program are being diverted to partisan purposes”.

What did the current Prime Minister do when he received that memo? He did absolutely nothing. Instead, we have seen nothing but procedural delays ever since this scandal came to light in 2002.

First the government claimed the Auditor General would solve the problem. The Minister of Finance, then minister of public works, stated, “in terms of the management issues, the value for money issues, the proper government framework and administrative issues, there is no more public forum...than the Auditor General”.

The current Minister of Finance, who was then the minister of public works, said that the Auditor General would look after it and solve it. However at the same time we saw years and years where millions of dollars of taxpayer money was being funnelled into the Liberal Party.

It is worth nothing that the minister made these statements as an argument against holding a public inquiry. They refused at the time to have an inquiry. When the Auditor General's report was ready in November 2003, was it tabled? No. What happened? It was the government that prorogued Parliament, another delay. What were they doing? The Liberals were buying time.

In February 2004, the report came out but now it appeared the Liberals required a public inquiry. This decision was something the opposition had been calling for over two years.

However the Liberals were not done with procedural delays. They had a few more tricks up their sleeves. First they used the majority to shut down the public accounts committee before key witnesses could appear. They had some witnesses prior to that but they shut down the committee before all the key witnesses were about to appear. It is important to emphasize that this was not a government scandal but a scandal inside the Liberal Party, so obviously they knew the damaging witnesses.

Today we see yet another concern with section (k) of the inquiry's mandate. It is important to note that section (k), which I quoted earlier, states that:

The Commissioner be directed to perform his duties without expressing any conclusion or recommendation regarding the civil or criminal liability of any person or organization....

I heard the Minister of Public Works state in a news conference that the commissioner does have the authority to name names and assign responsibility. If they believe that, then they should just support the motion. We are not asking them to do anything that would be inconsistent with recent Supreme Court of Canada rulings with respect to inquiries or the Inquiries Act. We just want to remove any ambiguity.

Members have heard the litany of the involvement of the Liberal Party in this file. It is our duty in this House to ensure that the public gets answers, that we get to the bottom of this and that people are held to account.

This issue is incredibly deep with corruption. Millions of dollars were improperly taken from taxpayers. Over half the money was

used to buy votes, the other half was used to pay Liberal friendly advertising agencies and millions more were funneled back to the Liberal Party. This is the worst kind of corruption that we have seen in Canadian political history, where millions and millions of dollars were funneled back to the Liberal Party. We have heard witness after witness all implicate—

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. It may be helpful to the House to deal with this matter right at the outset. To suggest that all of the activities the member has just gone through, of buying votes, of funneling millions of dollars and saying that this about the government, as you know, Mr. Speaker, all of these are illegal acts but they have not been proven in court.

Mr. Speaker, I would suggest it is improper to allege these things. We should clarify whether or not the Chair will accept in this place a definitive statement that there is corruption. It has to be qualified that it is allegation or it is based on somebody's testimony but it is not based on the rule of law of innocent until proven guilty.

• (1020)

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Mississauga South. In the debate members will have to be careful of course not to ascribe motives or actions to members of Parliament that are improper or illegal. However in a debate like this we will probably get into discussions about political parties and their involvement or lack thereof and the innocence and guilt on both sides. In that case we are going to hear it.

However we will not accept accusations against individual members of Parliament, nor should we. I have not heard anything like that. I have heard talk about parties and so on and that is something different than members of Parliament. I think we have to accept that.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, the Chair has often ruled consistently that the only way this will be a matter of concern to the Chair is if an individual member is accused of committing a criminal act. What could be worse than accusing all the Liberal members of being corrupt and of having done illegal acts?

The Deputy Speaker: I thought I was clear but let me repeat it. I have not heard any accusations against Liberal members of Parliament at all or any other members of Parliament. We are all hon. members. What I have heard are accusations about a political party. We are going to accept that because I think those discussions will take place throughout the day.

Again, that is different than someone saying that members of Parliament have engaged in some illegal or improper activity. No one has said that and we will not get into that but we will hear discussions about activities of political parties and that will be heard on both sides of the House throughout the day.

I urge members to be careful about the difference between talking about activities of political parties and individual members of Parliament.

Supply

Mr. Gary Lunn: Mr. Speaker, the commission has heard months and months of testimony from numerous witnesses. Admittedly, there is conflicting testimony but we can pick whatever version we want and it is all bad. Not one version has anything actually good to say about the Liberal Party.

Compounding that is the evidence that has now been submitted in documents that could not be refuted. We have heard from the forensic auditors who have confirmed the paper trail of Jean Brault, the president of Groupaction, who confirmed that envelopes of cash and suitcases of money went to the Liberal Party.

The reason it is important that everyone in the House support this motion is to make it crystal clear that the commissioner has the ability to name names and assign responsibilities.

This commission is different than any other commission we have had. The others all related to public policy, whether it was Krever or Somalia. This is the first time we have had a commission where millions of dollars have gone to a governing Liberal Party. Therefore it is imperative that responsibility be assigned and names be named.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the member to clarify the language for all who are watching the proceedings. I believe there is an insinuation in certain words, such as “to assign responsibility and name names”, which also means to be identified as being guilty of a criminal or civil offence. The words are very carefully crafted and I want to be sure that everybody understands.

If the member is going to suggest that naming names and assigning responsibility means finding out who is guilty and naming who is guilty of offences, maybe he should apologize to the House simply because if someone is going to be found guilty of any criminal offence or civil liability, that individual would have had access to due process under the rule of law and had an opportunity to call witnesses in his or her defence. That person would have to have been charged in the first place and been part of a process. We have to separate this idea of assigning responsibility. It could not in this particular inquiry conclude guilty of a criminal offence.

I will ask the member very sincerely to please explain to this place, in the clearest terms he understands, whether or not he interprets assigning responsibility as being guilty.

•(1025)

Mr. Gary Lunn: Mr. Speaker, it is absolutely ridiculous to even suggest that. The only place that can assign guilt to a criminal offence is in a court of law and it has to be proven beyond a reasonable doubt. That is not what we are suggesting. Some people are facing criminal charges now as we know and there may be more.

What we are suggesting is that Justice Gomery have the ability to name names and assign responsibility. If subsequent further actions result, then so be it, that is what needs to happen. People need to be held accountable, whether it is a civil action that is beyond a balance of probabilities or whether it is a criminal action that is beyond a reasonable doubt.

However what we are getting to is the fact that there is a much higher standard for elected officials. We have a duty of care as members of Parliament. I would argue, from the litany of testimony and evidence that we have heard before Justice Gomery, that

standard has been breached. I think it is imperative that Justice Gomery name names and assign responsibility. We are not talking about criminal responsibility. That would be in a separate action and it has to be done before a court of law. The same thing goes for civil action.

What we have heard in the evidence is unrefuted. No one has ever denied that millions of dollars went into the Liberal Party. I believe elected officials were involved and a lot of the evidence suggests that.

I believe the duty of care is so much higher as we have a higher public trust. That has been breached and that is what we are talking about.

We are asking the government to amend section (k) to read:

That the House call on the Government to amend section (k) of the Gomery Commission's terms of reference to allow the Commissioner to name names and assign responsibility.

People need to be held to account. Yes, criminal charges beyond a reasonable doubt and yes, a civil suit is a balance of probabilities, but I would argue that elected officials have a much higher duty of care and they have breached that. Justice Gomery has heard a mountain of evidence. Yes, there are some conflicts but we can pick any version we want and it is uniformly bad. The Canadian people have every right to be outraged and they want to get to the bottom of this.

Mr. Gerry Ritz (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today on the first supply day that we have been granted due to the stalling of supply days by the Liberal government. This is the first one we have had a chance to get back in the groove on and it is a great day for Canadians.

In the tremendous job Justice Gomery is doing we are going to see section (k) changed in his terms of reference. Right now that really handcuffs him in his final report. I know we have struck a nerve because I saw the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Public Works on television this morning talking about how this would disable Gomery, how procedurally it would be unfair and unjust to witnesses, and that this was not a court or tribunal but an inquiry.

However, if that is the case, why are they so concerned with Justice Gomery naming names? All of the witnesses have given sworn testimony before Justice Gomery. These are not allegations any more. Certainly, there are some cross purposes here as we see one faction of Liberals try to point the finger at another faction of Liberals, but the bottom line is they are all Liberals. This is a Liberal crisis, not a Canadian crisis. It should not even be a government crisis. The Liberals have taken another \$1 million of taxpayers' money to set up a war room to counter a lot of the negative media reports coming out of Gomery.

As the public works critic, I took this to heart when a lot of this broke a couple of years ago. We received a tremendous number of anonymous brown envelopes with undocumented and unsubstantiated claims. It is amazing to watch what has happened at the Gomery inquiry over the last six to eight months and much of the testimony coming forward. Those names are there; the dollar figures are there. It is amazing how accurate those brown envelopes were.

Supply

We were not able to use them because we could not substantiate them, but now we are seeing those same names and numbers coming out of Gomery. It really speaks to the fact that there is a lot of credibility in that inquiry, which we called for months before the government got around to calling for it.

The Prime Minister gets some credit for calling Gomery, but let us look at the chronology that led up to that. We started in November 2003 when the Auditor General came forward with a scathing indictment of what was happening at the sponsorship program saying there was over \$100 million that did not have any value for taxpayers' money. But no one saw that report.

The government received that report in November. It quickly prorogued the House due to a little leadership contest that happened over there. It actually went on for 10 years and culminated in November, but the report did not see the light of day until February. The Liberals had it for three months to clean it, sanitize it, and actually put their spin on it. We finally saw the Gomery inquiry called later that spring just before the election.

The Gomery inquiry did not start. It was actually held in abeyance until September. Justice Gomery had holidays to take. He had a couple of trial procedures that he was working on that he had to finish up. Basically, the Liberals bought some time. They came back here with a minority government. Canadians took this scandal to heart. The polls at that time said 66% of Canadians believed that all politicians were crooked.

That paints us all with that same brush and the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands, who just spoke, talked about the public trust. That is what is so important about letting Justice Gomery name names, trace the cash, and actually prepare a report to that end. We are not seeing that with the way he is handcuffed under section (k) and the way the Liberals set this up.

The public works minister stood in his place one day during question period and said that section (k) is standard in any inquiry. Maybe it is, but not in a case where public money has been abused and misused to this extent. Then section (k) becomes a roadblock to getting to the bottom of this.

As Justice Gomery gets to the end of his witness list and starts to think about putting together his report, it is incumbent on us to take those handcuffs off, to let him get to the bottom of this, and actually name some names, put them on paper. He is not going to ascertain guilt at that point. He is going to say that this is where his allegations lie because these people have come forward and this is what is being said about them. He must be able to do that.

That sets the stage for the criminal investigations to follow after the Gomery report. The witnesses will get their day in court again. This is all sworn testimony that can be used again. He has been very careful with publication bans on several of the civil servants who are facing criminal charges, but there are always political masters when it comes to bureaucrats.

• (1030)

We have a problem here. Either the minister of the day, and there have been several at Public Works, did not have a clue of what the department was doing, which is incompetence, or the minister was

involved at the political level and then we have a whole new problem.

These guys took it serious enough that they brought Alfonso Gagliano home from Denmark. They had him over there in the witness protection program. However, he came back and he sang like a canary when he got before Gomery.

We saw these folks come before the public accounts committee, which the existing Prime Minister shut down and would not allow to go any further saying that Gomery would take over when the public accounts committee was doing a great job. I sat in on some of those meetings. We had guys like Chuck Guité before the committee. He did not see anything, he did not hear anything, and he did not know anything. I could not for the life of me understand why we kept this guy on the payroll. If he did not do anything, did not see anything, and did not know anything, what was he getting paid for?

It turns out that under Gomery's cross-examination and testimony this guy was the linchpin, or one of them. However, he did not do it in a vacuum. No bureaucrat has access to \$355 million and is able to funnel it out there as was done. It just does not happen.

Then we see other folks come forward and testify that they had Liberal staffers who were paid for with cash. They had them on their payroll on a cash basis doing work for the Liberal Party in Quebec. That is a total misuse of taxpayers' money.

We had a little hiccup in Saskatchewan a number of years ago under then Premier Grant Devine. There was \$180,000 of party communications money, not public money, and not to the same extent that we are talking about here. We are talking millions here. That took that government out of existence. That party does not even exist in Saskatchewan any more.

However, these guys are so busy trying to hide from the fallout from this because they are so concerned about their Liberal Party future, and they should be because they are going to wear this into the next election and beyond.

Under the Gomery inquiry, we have seen that they have run the last three elections using bad money, dirty money. They are saying that there should be no ramifications and that Justice Gomery should not be able to name names. They are saying to keep them hidden and send them all to Denmark. How many ambassadors can we use? It just goes on and on. These guys just want this public inquiry for the media spin. They have set up a war room with \$1 million of taxpayers' money to counter the negative spin that is coming out.

I do not think the Gomery inquiry would ever have happened if the Liberals had come back with a majority government. I think Justice Gomery would have had the shortest job in history. He never would have started. However, with a minority government, they had to go forward with it. Now they are starting to face the wrath of public opinion out there. They are dropping like a rock in the polls as more and more people see the degree of the tainted money and the way it was followed through.

Routine Proceedings

The firm that is investigating this, Kroll Lindquist Avey, an American firm, are the guys that got to the bottom of the Enron scandal. They tracked down Saddam Hussein's money. Now they are in Canada. That speaks to the degree of this. They are saying they are stymied in some of their reporting by the roadblocks set up by the government. There are criminal charges facing a few folks. The government is suing some ad companies for \$41 million worth of money because it says there was no work for those dollars.

We talked about that years ago. We remember the three sets of photocopies that was done for \$500,000 a pop. Three pages were photocopied three times for \$1.5 million. The Liberals were saying there was work for money at that time. They were trying to hide behind that. If we were to go back in *Hansard*, we would see where the government was trying to justify what happened. Now it is saying, "Oh, my God, this thing was off the rails. It was just a few rogue people taking advantage of the largesse of the Liberal Party".

Can members imagine somebody taking advantage of the Liberal Party in government and using taxpayers' money in that way? There is no political connection here. That is what they would like us to believe.

If that is the case, why were we hiding a former public works minister in Denmark? Why do we have a litany of them rushing through here? Nobody wanted the job. It was the kiss of death to take that on. They all know how corrupt a cesspool it was.

Justice Gomery needs every tool available to him when he starts to write that report. He needs to be able to name names. He is not going to assign guilt, but he is going to be able to name those names and turn that over to the RCMP for the proper investigation that this merits.

•(1035)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not think there is anybody in this place, or those watching, who would question whether or not Justice Gomery is going to name names. Clearly, in a public proceeding that has been in the newspapers for months names are going to be mentioned in the report. I think the context of what the member has been talking about is more about assigning guilt.

I believe the member is going to find that the Gomery report will in fact identify who made what allegations and who was responsible in the context of accountability for certain actions and activities, but will not comment on whether or not there is guilt or innocence with regard to something that would require the due process of law.

Has the member checked with legal counsel to determine whether or not a change in the mandate of Justice Gomery may lead to a charge by some persons involved in that inquiry to say that since the mandate has changed, this must all be redone? These individuals may now want an opportunity to defend themselves because we are now doing something different than what they were told in the first place. Has the member checked this? Is he in fact absolutely sure that he is not going to jeopardize the Gomery inquiry?

•(1040)

Mr. Gerry Ritz: Mr. Speaker, members opposite cannot have it both ways. They argue that this is not a courtroom, so it cannot be binding and we cannot name names. Then they hide behind the fact

that it is only an inquiry, so we cannot name names. The hon. member opposite asks if this will disable Gomery? Of course it will not. This is all done in his report. He will not ascertain blame, but he will be able to name names. Let me read section (k) again. It says:

the Commissioner be directed to perform his duties without expressing any conclusion or recommendation regarding the civil or criminal liability of any person or organization and to ensure that the conduct of the inquiry does not jeopardize any ongoing criminal investigation or criminal proceedings;

All we are saying is that we should take out the terms that say "without expressing any conclusion". Justice Gomery must be able to follow the money trail like everybody else. He must be able to connect the dots. Everybody is innocent until proven guilty in this country. No one is going to jail the day Gomery presents his report, but the report from Justice Gomery will set the stage.

He has done the groundwork. The RCMP will not have to go back and reinvent the wheel. He will be able to carry on from that point. This will actually enhance the Gomery report, not take away from it by any stretch of the imagination. The members opposite would love to say that this will somehow disable Gomery.

The public works minister is announcing today that he is coming forward with his own motion. If that is the case, why did we not do it six months ago? Why did we put section (k) in to begin with? Why did we jeopardize the outcome of the Gomery inquiry by handcuffing Justice Gomery to begin with?

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS AND NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Discussions have taken place between all parties concerning the debate that is scheduled for later this day on a motion from the member for Nunavut concerning the adoption of the third report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. I believe that you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That today's debate on the motion from the member for Nunavut and the amendment from the member for Kitchener Centre concerning the third report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development be deemed to have taken place, the questions deemed to have been put, recorded divisions requested and deferred to the end of government orders on Wednesday, June 8.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Supply

(Motion agreed to)

[Translation]

I am proud of our Prime Minister for having the guts to establish the commission and give it the resources necessary to get at the truth.

[English]

Frankly, it seems the Conservatives are now trying to tarnish the reputation of the work that Justice Gomery is doing by trying to discredit the very strong and significant mandate that Justice Gomery has been given.

The opposition day motion suggests that the Gomery commission should have, in the final days of testimony, its mandate changed such that the Gomery commission would have the ability to name names and assign responsibility.

The Gomery commission and Justice Gomery already has the authority to name names and assign responsibility.

It would seem that the motion is either redundant or mischievous. I am tempted by the notion that it could be mischievous. It either speaks to the Conservatives' ongoing contempt for the court system and the judicial process or to their desire to tarnish the work that Justice Gomery is doing in anticipation of a report that will be balanced and that will judge our Prime Minister fairly and reasonably as someone who has conducted himself honourably.

On February 19, 2004, by order in council, the sponsorship inquiry was created under part I of the Inquiries Act with Justice John Gomery appointed as the commissioner. He was asked to make a factual inquiry, investigate and report on questions raised directly or indirectly by chapters 3 and 4 of the November 2003 report of the Auditor General.

The Conservative Party misunderstands clause (k), a clause that says the following:

the Commissioner be directed to perform his duties without expressing any conclusion or recommendation regarding the civil or criminal liability of any person or organization and to ensure that the conduct of the inquiry does not jeopardize any ongoing criminal investigation or criminal proceedings;

Let us consider that.

[Translation]

For a start, clause k is also consistent with many examples from other inquiries.

[English]

The same wording is present in the Arar inquiry under Justice O'Connor. It is the number three term of reference for the Ipperwash inquiry set up by the Conservative government in Ontario. It was there as well in the Walkerton commission set up by the Conservative government in Ontario. It was part of the terms of reference for the Stonechild inquiry set up by the NDP government in Saskatchewan.

Clause (k) is also consistent with what the courts say about inquiries and the criminal justice system. For example, here is what the Federal Court of Canada said about the Somalia inquiry, "A public inquiry is not equivalent to a civil or criminal trial".

GOVERNMENT ORDERS*[English]***SUPPLY**

OPPOSITION MOTION—GOMERY COMMISSION

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have great respect for the fact that the official opposition can bring forth any debate for a motion. After a week of being in my riding, an awful lot of people spoke to me about issues other than Gomery. They spoke to issues about the trouble seniors are having in this country, the difficulty farmers and forestry products people are having. They spoke about our fishery people, our people in the mining industry and about workers who are unable to write off their expenses for going across the country.

Although I have respect for what opposition members do and they are correct, the fact is that the Liberals will be judged on the Gomery inquiry eventually and people will have their day.

However, of all the issues facing Canadians, from farmers to students to seniors and to everyone else, I am wondering why members of that party thought that this was the most important issue to discuss, even though the inquiry is still ongoing, and all the other issues facing Canadians seem to fall by the wayside for now. I would like the hon. member to answer that question.

Mr. Gerry Ritz: Mr. Speaker, the NDP has a supply day coming up too and I am sure its members will address that hodge-podge of issues he is talking about.

Certainly, there are other issues out there. There is no doubt about it. However, this is basic public trust. The Liberals no longer consider the House relevant and until we get to the bottom of it, clean it up, and begin to rebuild that foundation of public trust, it will not happen.

Let me speak to the NDP wish list for a minute. Let us talk about the magic beans budget that it attached to the other one. There is nothing in that budget about the funding problems in the equalization formula. That speaks to all of the provinces across this country, other than the Atlantic accord, especially to Saskatchewan, my home province. It did not say anything about agriculture, coast to coast. There is nothing in that budget that the NDP attached about agriculture. I take no lessons from that member on what is a priority in the House.

•(1045)

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to the opposition day motion about the Gomery commission.

First, the Gomery commission is doing very important work. I know the hon. member opposite just said that the Prime Minister deserved credit for having established the Gomery commission, and that is true.

Supply

The Supreme Court ruling in the case of the Attorney General versus the commission of inquiry on the blood system ruled that several basic principles were applicable to inquiries. It stated the following:

A commission of inquiry is not a court or tribunal and has no authority to determine legal liability...A commissioner accordingly should endeavour to avoid setting out conclusions that are couched in the specific language of criminal culpability or civil liability.

Again it would seem that the Conservatives lack an understanding or perhaps a respect for the judicial process and the court system.

There is obvious difference between inquiries and criminal prosecutions. Still, let us be clear. Justice Gomery can indeed name names and draw conclusions as to responsibility and as to whether there has been misconduct on behalf of any individual or organization.

Let us look at what Justice Gomery himself said in his opening statement for his inquiry, and I quote Justice Gomery directly:

According to s.13 of the Inquiries Act, which will be discussed in more detail later, I am entitled to draw conclusions as to whether there has been misconduct and who may be responsible for it.

Later Justice Gomery elaborates on how he will determine accountability and the extent to which specific individuals failed to carry out their responsibilities, and again I quote directly from Justice Gomery:

—whether there was political influence involved in the activities and, if so, by whom, to what purpose, and to what effect...whether any person or organization in the Government of Canada gained an advantage financially, politically or otherwise from the activities and, if so who, to what purpose, and to what effect;

It is curious that the mandate is sufficient for Justice Gomery to say emphatically that he has the right and intends to exercise that right to name names and assign responsibilities. It is good enough for Justice Gomery but it does not seem good enough for the Conservatives.

Let me again quote from what the Supreme Court said in the Krever case:

A commissioner has the power to make all relevant findings of fact necessary to explain or support the recommendations, even if these findings reflect adversely upon individuals. Further, a commissioner may make findings of misconduct based on the factual findings...

● (1050)

[Translation]

Inquiries are designed as a tool to help us get to the truth about wrongdoing or misconduct in the administration of a government.

[English]

There is a further reason why there must be a difference between a criminal trial and a public inquiry. Individuals cannot participate freely, openly and honestly in a public inquiry if they fear that the inquiry itself will name them as being criminally responsible with the threat of criminal prosecution to follow.

Clause (k) simply ensures and protects individuals testifying in a public inquiry from this type of self-incrimination, something that is a legal right under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Then again, we know where the Conservative Party stands on the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

I believe this is an example of a misunderstanding and/or contempt for the independence of the judiciary, the court system and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Remember that is the party where the member of Parliament for Abbotsford said last year “The heck with the courts. Serious flaws exist in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms”. Any party that seeks to govern our country needs to at least understand the laws of the land.

The key point is that public inquiries by design are not aimed at replacing or superceding the criminal or civil justice system. Again, they cannot find anyone guilty of a criminal offence or make a finding of civil liability. Besides, there is already parallel processes in place currently that are working well to do exactly that.

There are criminal investigations. Charges have been laid against several individuals who are now awaiting trial. There are nineteen charges against Paul Coffin, six charges against both Jean Brault and Chuck Guité, one against Jacques Paradis. In fact, I believe Paul Coffin earlier today pled guilty. We do not want to interfere with those criminal proceedings and we ought not to do that.

The hon. member for Central Nova, who has in the past been a crown prosecutor, ought to understand how troublesome it would be if, as a crown prosecutor, a case against an individual was jeopardized by an inquiry that was seeking to involve itself in assigning criminal or civil liabilities.

At least a few months ago he understood that principle. This is what the hon. member for Central Nova said to the *Toronto Star* last year about the terms of reference for Gomery. He said:

Well, they're certainly broad. There's no denying that the early indications are that the terms of reference will allow people to go where they have to go.

The member for Central Nova was right then and that is why the Conservative Party is wrong today.

Also a civil action was filed in the Quebec Superior Court by our government on March 11. This action is aimed at recovering \$41 million from 19 firms and individuals. All along we have said that this can be amended to reflect new claims and defendants if supporting evidence is found or comes out of the hearings before the sponsorship inquiry.

We are reviewing the forensic reports from Kroll Lindquist. Not only do they affirm the validity of our claim against these firms and individuals, but they also allow us to seriously consider amending and augmenting that claim in the near future.

● (1055)

[Translation]

There is another important reason why we should not change the terms of reference for the Gomery commission—a reason that touches on basic fairness as well as justice.

[English]

To suddenly change the rules, to change the terms of reference of an independent judicial inquiry could mean in fact starting over from scratch and redoing the entire hearings. After all, every single witness has appeared before Gomery under specific rules exempting him or her from being named as criminally responsible or being threatened with criminal prosecution as a result of the person's testimony.

In fact, any change to the terms of reference whatsoever would allow individuals who have appeared and have provided testimony in good faith before Gomery to say their testimony is null and void because the rules have changed in the final days of testimony. It is a fact that both the inquiry and the government would be exposed to legitimate legal action by individuals who, in good faith, appeared before Justice Gomery according to the terms of reference of the Gomery inquiry and the mandate of that inquiry.

It is ludicrous to think of redefining the mandate in the final weeks of Gomery testimony. To take action that would jeopardize the good work that Justice Gomery has done would mean delaying justice. Justice delayed is justice denied. It would also mean spending more hard-earned taxpayers' money when in fact Canadians have confidence in Justice Gomery and in the mandate he has.

Canadians understand that Justice Gomery has the right to name names and assign responsibilities. In fact we as a government affirm and support that right and look forward to him doing exactly that. We have criminal actions and civil actions to recover funds, and we have Justice Gomery who can indeed make findings of misconduct against individuals. More important, he can recommend actions to make certain that this kind of unacceptable behaviour cannot happen again.

It is a matter of finding facts but most important, it is about lessons learned and recommendations on how to avoid a repeat of the same unfortunate situation in the future. We intend to use the recommendations of Justice Gomery, his prescriptives, to strengthen the governance of this country and to benefit taxpayers for generations.

I would like to quote Kent Roach, a law professor at the University of Toronto, who said, "Public inquiries play an important role by helping us see the social, political, economic and organizational factors that play a role in wrongdoing and which must be changed if wrongs are to be prevented". That is exactly the point. Justice Gomery is going to give us a blueprint to prevent this type of activity from ever happening again.

This attempt to amend clause (k) is redundant and frivolous, or simply mischievous. It is all about making a concerted attempt, in the final days of the Gomery inquiry, to try to cast some seeds of doubt about the work of Justice Gomery, to cast a pall over the important work that he is doing. It is obvious that the Conservatives have now realized that in fact Justice Gomery could present a balanced, fair and tough report but one that will not provide the kind of blanket recriminations that the Conservatives would like to see. The fact is the Gomery report will identify individual wrongdoing, and we are confident he will conclude that our Prime Minister acted honourably.

Supply

The *Globe and Mail* said recently in an editorial, "Despite the opposition's attempts to tar the Prime Minister with the sponsorship brush, there is nothing so far to suggest that he himself did anything wrong". The *National Post* said, "The Prime Minister's relationship to the sponsorship program appears tangential at best".

[Translation]

The Conservatives want to discredit Justice Gomery and discredit his report before it even comes out.

• (1100)

[English]

The Conservatives want to cast a pall over the work of this commission. The fact is that if they have an understanding of the laws of the land, they will realize that Justice Gomery already has the right to name names and assign responsibilities. In fact, by the time Justice Gomery reports, the criminal courts may have already passed judgment on the criminal liability of some of the players involved in this situation.

I say let Justice Gomery do his work. Let him finish the important work he is doing on behalf of Canadians. I would like to present a motion we are tabling today to underscore our confidence in Justice Gomery's mandate. The motion reads, "The House confirms that with reference to the Gomery inquiry, the commissioner has the authority under the Inquiries Act rulings of the Supreme Court of Canada and his existing terms of reference to name names and assign responsibility".

The fact is if the Conservatives simply want to ensure that Justice Gomery has the right to name names and assign responsibility, but at the same time to avoid changing the terms of reference that could disable the work that he is doing, it would be appropriate for them to work constructively with us to support this motion and to affirm once again that Justice Gomery has the authority to name names and to assign responsibility.

Canadians want us to make this Parliament work. This is a constructive motion that seeks to affirm the intent of the Conservative motion and at the same time not jeopardize the work of the Gomery commission.

The Deputy Speaker: During his remarks the minister mentioned that he would like to propose a motion, but we are already debating a motion and it is not within the rules to propose another motion. He could propose an amendment if he had the consent of the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands, but it was not worded in the form of an amendment and so it is not receivable at this time. Perhaps the minister would like to talk to members opposite.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am going to mention a few names. They may disagree on details, but these individuals have confessed to serious wrongdoings: Corriveau, Béliveau, Corbeil, Boulay, Lafleur, Gagliano, Renaud, and many others.

Supply

People in the province of Quebec who have been following this very intensely know two things. Those individuals have confessed to serious wrongdoings, a massive conspiracy to defraud taxpayers of this country. More individuals have confessed. They may disagree on detail, but they have confessed to that. This is not testimony; it is their confessions. The second thing people in Quebec understand is that every one of those individuals is a Liberal. They include three executive directors of the Liberal Party of Quebec.

The minister should know that he is totally wrong in saying that Justice Gomery has a free hand to say what has happened is a massive criminal fraud against the taxpayers of Canada. The terms of reference do not allow Justice Gomery to make that finding. He is talking about the number of angels dancing on the head of a pin with his technical arguments. I know the minister has no legal training, but he is trying to make people believe that he has some great legal mind.

There is a big difference between what he is saying and what Justice Gomery can say. When Justice Gomery is finished he should have the freedom to say that a massive criminal fraud was perpetrated against the Canadian public by the Liberal Party of Canada. The terms of reference do not give him that power. I am quite sure that if he even tried to move in that area, people in the party opposite would be the first ones to go to court to file injunctions to try to restrict his ability to do so.

Will the minister tell me whether Justice Gomery has a free hand to determine whether the Liberal Party was involved in a massive criminal and civil fraud conspiracy against Canadian taxpayers? It is a straightforward question.

● (1105)

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is quite right that I am not a lawyer. He said that I do not have a legal mind. I would question with that kind of rhetoric whether he has a mind.

An hon. member: Oh, come on.

An hon. member: You're crap.

An hon. member: That's a low blow.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, I would urge some level of decorum opposite to listen to what Justice Gomery says about his own mandate. I think Justice Gomery, a learned jurist is probably almost as smart as the hon. member. Justice Gomery said:

I am entitled to draw conclusions as to whether there has been misconduct and who may be responsible for it.... [For example,] whether there was political influence involved in the activities and, if so, by whom, to what purpose, and to what effect; whether any person or organization in the Government of Canada gained an advantage financially, politically or otherwise from the activities and, if so who, to what purpose, and to what effect.

Those are Justice Gomery's words. The hon. member is saying that Justice Gomery is wrong. The hon. member is saying he is in the know and Justice Gomery does not understand the laws of the land. I believe Canadians will trust Justice Gomery's judgment on this more so than they would trust the hon. member's.

Mr. Gary Lunn (Saanich—Gulf Islands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to comment on some of the minister's comments when he stated that the Conservative Party is trying to cast doubt over Justice Gomery's work. It is very important that we put on the record that

nothing could be further from truth, absolutely nothing. I would ask the minister to temper his remarks as we just heard in his reply to the other hon. member. If he wants civility and decorum in the House, we should stay respectful and factual.

Also, he stated that Justice Gomery is going to come up with recommendations to prevent this from ever happening again. I respect Justice Gomery and all the work that he is doing. He can make all sorts of rules and recommendations, and I suspect he is going to come up with quite a few, but the bottom line is that the only people who can prevent this from ever happening again are the members who sit in the House.

It is very important to remember that this is a Liberal Party scandal, the current government in power. Millions of dollars were funnelled into the Liberal Party. There is a litany of testimony. There is irrefutable evidence before the commission where cash was sprinkled throughout ridings in Quebec. It comes back to our own honesty and integrity in this place as members. That is what we have to get to the bottom of.

The minister said that this motion is redundant or frivolous. Our motion simply says that Gomery should have the ability to name names and assign responsibility, full stop. That is all we are saying, that he should have the ability to name names and assign responsibility. The minister stated that he believes that Gomery has that now. If Gomery has that now, then the minister should just support the motion, even if it is redundant. We are just trying to clear up any ambiguity and it is a very legitimate, genuine motion.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, first of all, our House leader has given notice of the motion which in fact will be on tomorrow's order paper. Our motion simply states that the House confirms that with reference to the Gomery inquiry, the commissioner has the authority under the Inquiries Act rulings of the Supreme Court of Canada and his existing terms of reference to name names and assign responsibility.

If the intent of the Conservatives is simply to ensure that Justice Gomery has the right to name names and assign responsibility, they ought to recognize that the government's motion makes far more sense because it does not seek to change the terms of reference and in doing so jeopardize the entire work of the Gomery commission. The Conservatives know that changing the terms of reference in the final days of testimony would jeopardize and disable the judicial inquiry. If they do not know that, then they are certainly demonstrating to Canadians a lack of understanding.

Once again, I will go to Justice Gomery's own words when he said, "I am entitled to draw conclusions as to whether there has been misconduct and who may be responsible for it". Justice Gomery has earned the respect over decades as a learned jurist in Canada. He is earning respect from Canadians for his work in leading this important inquiry. I trust Justice Gomery when he says that he has the right currently under his terms of reference, under his mandate, to name names and assign responsibility.

Supply

● (1110)

Mr. Paul Forseth (New Westminster—Coquitlam, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have heard the minister very clearly. He has been quoting Justice Gomery. From what I heard, Justice Gomery was staking out new ground and enlarging the envelope to ensure that he did have the freedom, in spite of clause (k).

I would like the minister to state in this House that when the tough time comes, the Liberals are going to support the wording that he has just quoted and not back down, that Justice Gomery is looking for a larger horizon and that the government is not going to hold him to the limits of clause (k), which reads, “directed to perform his duties without expressing any conclusion or recommendation regarding the civil or criminal liability”.

First, Justice Gomery has enlarged that and the minister has quoted that. Therefore, I am expecting the minister is going to make a commitment on behalf of the Liberals that they are going to defend the Gomery interpretation rather than the (k) interpretation.

Second, rather than the cabinet sitting on it or holding it or having discussions or whatever, the report by Justice Gomery will be tabled in the news media for everybody to know.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, once again I will quote from Justice Gomery. Justice Gomery is not seeking to expand his mandate, as the hon. member is trying to nefariously infer. Justice Gomery recognizes, because he understands the laws of the land and his mandate, that he already has that right. That is why Justice Gomery says:

According to s.13 of the Inquiries Act, which will be discussed in more detail later, I am entitled to draw conclusions as to whether there has been misconduct and who may be responsible for it.

Again, Justice Gomery is referring specifically to section 13 of the Inquiries Act, that he is entitled to draw conclusions.

The government and the Prime Minister have demonstrated tremendous intestinal fortitude by supporting Justice Gomery during what has been not an easy time for this party. He is doing the right thing and putting country before party, putting principle before partisan strategy, standing up for Canadians and doing the right thing by getting to the truth in this issue.

* * *

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, discussions have taken place among all parties regarding the course of this evening's debate on the main estimates in committee of the whole and I believe you would find consent for the following motion. Having been in the Chair for the committee of the whole, you will remember that this is a similar motion to the one passed a few weeks ago with respect to the order of proceedings this evening.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—GOMERY COMMISSION

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The minister who just replied to one of our questioners on the Conservative side of the House made some extremely derogatory remarks and I would ask that he withdraw them. He talks about civility in the House and at the same time he has made some extremely derogatory charges to the effect the people over here do not have a mind. I would ask him to withdraw that. It is totally unacceptable that this kind of language is used in the House.

● (1115)

The Deputy Speaker: We do want to keep it civil, but I just took it as part of the debate. It will probably come up again later on in the debate perhaps.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today on behalf of the Bloc Québécois to this motion introduced by our friends in the Conservative party. I must disappoint my Conservative colleagues, however, and inform them that the Bloc cannot support this motion as currently worded.

I should say, at the outset, that the intent is good. At the end of the work of the Gomery commission, Quebecers and Canadians and all the members of this House without exception, especially the opposition members, have been keeping a close eye on this Liberal government as the evidence coming out of the Gomery commission makes it increasingly clear that this is a corrupt party and that this government in any case no longer has the moral authority to govern.

All one needs to do is look at what went on about ten days ago, with all the deals leading to the non-confidence vote on the budget. This vote went down to a tie-breaker in the House of Commons. We saw the NDP literally being bought for \$4.6 billion. Certain people could also be seen trying to buy Quebec and Canadian taxpayers with election promises coming out at a cost of a billion dollars a day. Finally, the cherry on the cake, the crowning achievement, was when they bought the ambitions and loyalty of the current member for Newmarket—Aurora, who was made a minister. They bought her loyalty for a position as minister.

We also saw the Prime Minister's attempts—successful in one case—to buy the vote of the independent member for North Surrey by means of very anti-Quebec remarks to the effect that it did not make any sense to associate oneself with the separatists and the Bloc Québécois to bring down the government. This argument had already been used to persuade the member for Newmarket—Aurora to join the ranks of the Conservative party.

Supply

I must say once again to my friends in the Conservative party that, basically, we agree with the principle that when Justice Gomery reaches the end of his inquiry, he should be able to state or make public the names of the people at fault and assign blame. However, we must also say that there is a problem with the wording of this motion.

We tried in good faith through informal negotiations to get the wording changed because to support this motion as introduced before the House would amount to rewriting the mandate of the Gomery commission. That could compromise the testimony that has already been given before Justice Gomery.

I am a lawyer. Anyone with a basic understanding of law will quickly realize that the rules of evidence, examination and cross-examination are not the same for civil and criminal proceedings. For that reason, the Bloc Québécois cannot support this motion.

The Bloc Québécois did not become interested in the work of the Gomery commission just last week or during the somewhat juicier testimony in Montreal. From May 2000 until now—that is, until yesterday—over 700 questions on the sponsorship scandal have been asked in the House.

• (1120)

This is further proof that, had it not been for the efforts of the Bloc Québécois members who have dogged this government, perhaps the sponsorship scandal might have gone in a completely different direction. It also provides my 53 Bloc colleagues with answers, during the next—hopefully very soon—election campaign, for anyone wondering what the Bloc Québécois does. The Bloc Québécois shook things up with regard to the sponsorship scandal. We were the ones who questioned the three Groupaction reports, each photocopy of which cost \$550,000, and the outdoor shows where cronies received commissions. Since May 2000, the Bloc Québécois has been here with its questions. We did not wait for the Gomery commission to be established.

So we need to put things into context. It is important to know that the Gomery commission was created under the Inquiries Act, section 2 of which states that, “The Governor in Council may, whenever the Governor in Council deems it expedient, cause inquiry to be made into and concerning any matter connected with the good government of Canada or the conduct of any part of the public business thereof”.

So if Parliament wanted to amend the Gomery commission's terms of reference to allow the commissioner to name names and assign responsibility, an amendment would have to be made to the Inquiries Act, which dates back to 1985. As I said, we feel that acting on this Conservative Party motion, and changing the terms at this stage of the inquiry, would be tantamount to compromising its work.

If anyone needs convincing of that, they need only recall that I spoke on behalf of my party about how pleased we were with Justice Gomery's appointment. This is a man whom we have always considered to be a man of integrity, professionalism and attention to detail, and we still do. He seeks to find out the truth, what really happened in the sponsorship scandal. Justice Gomery is not far from his 73rd birthday and is not looking for any political appointment from the Liberal Party. He is doggedly continuing his work. One

need only see him in action at the inquiry to realize the extent of his integrity.

I thought it was funny yesterday to see on the news that former Prime Minister Chrétien was thinking of deferring his call for Justice Gomery to step down. A good thing. One might well wonder who would be served by gagging the commissioner. His credibility is beyond question. If, however, his terms of reference were changed in mid-inquiry, someone could go back to the federal court and vitiate the entire process. That is not what we want. We want to know his conclusions as quickly as possible.

Commissioner Gomery has not held this inquiry in order to lay charges. That was not his mandate, in fact. We realize that the testimony heard will certainly be insufficient to enable the commissioner to name names. I want to make it perfectly clear that the Bloc Québécois' opposition to this motion must not be interpreted as a lack of interest in finding out which individuals committed illegal acts.

• (1125)

We hope that the RCMP and the Sûreté du Québec and the other police forces involved will lay charges over the course of proceedings.

This morning, Paul Coffin pleaded guilty to 15 charges of fraud against him. There will be an opportunity to identify the links between him and the Liberal Party of Canada.

The work of the Gomery Commission is based, to some extent, on a commitment. The witnesses are invited to reveal all in exchange for a promise that the judge will make no recommendations as to their civil or criminal liability. So, to alter this principle along the way would be to break the promise or fail to honour the commitment.

We also contend that the work of the Gomery commission would have been conducted very differently had the commissioner had the option of making recommendations on individuals' civil or criminal liability.

We in the Bloc believe that the Gomery commission's current mandate, albeit imperfect—its mandate could have been worded differently—is broad enough to provide an idea of the facts of the sponsorship scandal. The Bloc's priority is to have the judge submit his report as early as possible and be given all the latitude and calm he needs to do his work in peace.

Then, as I mentioned, the RCMP and the Chief Electoral Officer can intervene. If tainted money was used to finance the election campaign of Liberal candidates in 2000—Marc-Yvan Côté admits he disbursed some \$120,000 of dirty money to Liberal candidates in eastern Quebec, which means they campaigned against us, against me, the member from the Québec City area—I hope that the Chief Electoral Officer will investigate. That does not mean no charges will be laid. The Department of National Revenue could also lay charges.

Supply

In the end, the Bloc believes it is up to the public to punish the politicians responsible for this scandal, on that side of the House—the past and current leaders of the Liberal Party. We must not forget there are still people involved on that side of the House—ministers, even. Even chiefs of staff of current ministers have been suspended, because they dipped into the sponsorship scandal.

It is a very partial gain, but because of pressure by the Bloc, we got the Liberal Party to set up a trust fund for tainted money. We still maintain that \$750,000 in it is totally unacceptable and inadequate.

According to our calculations, the Liberal Party should put at least \$5.3 million into the dirty money trust fund. So far no one has disputed that. We can provide a detailed calculation to the penny. It is not a number made up from our wishful thinking. We are proposing this number because the amount of \$5.3 million was not just plucked out of thin air. This figure comes directly from the admissions and testimony at the Gomery commission. The government need not think we are satisfied with the \$750,000 deposited in the dirty money trust fund.

Under the current conditions, not only does Justice Gomery not have the authority to initiate proceedings against the people involved, but, technically, he cannot name any guilty parties. Let us remember that the Gomery commission is a commission of inquiry, which means it can only make recommendations and does not have any real legal authority.

• (1130)

Indeed, section (k) of the terms of reference specified by the Privy Council under Part I of the Inquiries Act, stipulates that:

the Commissioner be directed to perform his duties without expressing any conclusion or recommendation regarding the civil or criminal liability of any person or organization and to ensure that the conduct of the inquiry does not jeopardize any ongoing criminal investigation or criminal proceedings.

I know that my colleagues from the Conservative Party could retort by saying that the wording of their motion stipulates that they want to amend section (k) of the terms of reference. I acknowledge that, but at this point it is far too late. We do not have a machine to travel back in time. A series of witnesses have already been heard. What do we do about that? Think about Joe Morselli, who appeared last week without a lawyer. If the terms of reference had been different, he might have made a different decision.

Think of the work by the commission prosecutors, Bernard Roy, Guy Courmoyer, Neil Finkelstein and Marie Cossette. The questions were at times very suggestive. I am not laying blame so much as making an observation. A Crown prosecutor questioning a witness with the intent to lay criminal charges does not use the same approach as a prosecutor in a commission of inquiry. There is a big difference.

The commission's work is based on a promise: witnesses are invited to make full disclosure, and in exchange the judge will make no recommendations on civil or criminal responsibility. Accepting the Conservative Party recommendation would be tantamount to compromising that promise in mid-inquiry.

On May 30, 2005, Justice Gomery stated the following: “—we are not in a court of justice and I must accept all manner of testimony for all possible sources—”. The rules on examination and cross-

examination, on testimony, and on representation by counsel, are not the same as in a criminal hearing.

Since my time is just about up, I will conclude on this note: we in the Bloc Québécois consider that only the public can judge political responsibility. It has been made clear that there was political direction in the sponsorship scandal.

We have found that the present terms of the Gomery Commission are sufficiently broad to give some notion of the facts. We in the Bloc Québécois want to see Commissioner Gomery submit his report as quickly as possible, particularly since that report will surely be followed by an election. In fact, in his solemn address to the nation, the Prime Minister, virtually on the verge of tears, acknowledged that he had lacked firmness and control. He made a promise that, if it were proven that even \$1 of dirty money had gone to help the Liberal Party, it would be paid back immediately. That is why we are telling him that a \$750,000 trust is insufficient; it should be \$5.3 million. The PM also made a solemn promise to call an election within 30 days of the date the Gomery Commission report is tabled, which is supposed to be December 15. Thirty days later, that is, on January 15, the Prime Minister should be calling an election to be held in February.

• (1135)

In the end, it is the public, the people of Quebec and of Canada, who will be the judges of political responsibility. I am certain that the people of Quebec, who were prepared a week or so ago and will be equally prepared this fall or next January, will know how to punish this Liberal government which no longer has the moral authority to govern.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the chief whip of the Bloc Québécois for a number of his comments. Clearly, we may not share the same opinion on all points, but I am quite sensitive to a number of the remarks he made. His speech was well thought out and he did his research.

I want to ask him if he could clarify the comment he made early in his speech that an individual testifies before a commission of inquiry under certain conditions, or in accordance with certain terms of reference under the Inquiries Act.

For example, an individual agrees to testify under oath before a commission of inquiry and then later, after 90% of the witnesses have been heard, the terms of reference are changed, as the Conservatives' motion is calling for today. In the member's opinion, what is the risk of changing the terms of reference after the fact, after proceedings have been underway for some time? What impact might this have on the rights of witnesses who agreed to testify and did so in good faith before the commission?

It is possible that an appeal might be made to the federal court—as was mentioned, I believe—which would invalidate the work done to date. We agree, I think, that it would be unfortunate if that were to happen.

Supply

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, I am somewhat surprised by the question. I hope no one watching us thinks this is a planted question to allow me to get more mileage out of this issue, especially since it comes from my Liberal colleague. I can assure you we have no intention of praising the Liberal Party for what happened in the sponsorship scandal. Nonetheless, I feel I should explain.

Our interpretation is that a witness could abort or at least suspend the work of Justice Gomery and prevent the quick publication of his report. I gave you the example of Joe Morselli. He could come and say that he would have prepared differently if Justice Gomery had been able to lay criminal charges against him.

Nothing says that the police forces listening to the evidence, and those who will analyze it, cannot lay charges. Some witnesses are already being tried criminally. I mentioned Coffin, who pleaded guilty this morning. Nonetheless, criminal charges will not come from Justice Gomery.

A witness could appear and say he would have testified differently, that his degree of preparation and presentation of his evidence would have been different, that his lawyer would have cross-examined him differently. A witness who appeared without a lawyer could say he would have had one.

If the commission proceedings are not actually aborted, then there is a possibility that its work might be suspended because of these legal proceedings. We cannot agree with that. We want the truth as soon as possible.

• (1140)

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was actually quite taken aback that in a matter of about a minute the member outlined the case of why this was an improper motion by saying that it violates the rules under the Canada Evidence Act and the whole argument that he laid out.

It is clear to the member, to his party, to the minister and I think to others that, based on the legal opinion, this motion could have the consequences of disrupting or in fact totally destroying the work of the Gomery commission today.

The minister suggested that this might be just a redundant motion or mischievous. I am beginning to wonder whether this is an incompetent motion because the Conservatives do not seem to recognize or understand the laws of the land. They may just be reckless and irresponsible because should the motion pass, and it is a possibility in this place when it comes to a vote, this could actually terminate the Gomery commission and have people go to the Federal Court saying that all of their evidence has been outside of the context.

I would like to ask the member's opinion. Is this a dangerous motion for the Conservative Party to have posed to the House?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, I would say to my friend across the aisle that it is not up to him to judge whether the motion introduced by the Conservative party is redundant, useful or useless. Through you, I would like to ask the member just who he thinks he is to decide that the motion is redundant.

This Liberal government has become so arrogant that it has taken to attacking opposition days. In addition to having unilaterally cut the opposition days—when the government was literally trembling in its boots that it would be defeated on a non-confidence motion—it decided at 5:59 p.m. to cut the opposition days of the Conservatives and the NDP. In this way it blocked all the opposition days. That is the first proof of an arrogant government.

Now they are taking their arrogance even further by giving back the first opposition day but saying that the motion is redundant. Let the Liberal party vote as it wants.

The member emphasized that the Minister of Public Works and Government Services said that the motion was redundant. I definitely do not want to associate myself with this Minister of Public Works and Government Services. The Bloc is against this motion. We made this decision together and thought it through together. I have nothing to do with what this minister thinks, whose answers are a perfect demonstration of his arrogance. In fact, he gives us beautiful responses on the Gomery Commission all typed up by the war room, paid for to the tune of \$1 million and at the service of the Liberal party. This amount was revealed last week by Jack Aubry in the *Ottawa Citizen*. The million dollars that the war room costs has been paid by taxpayers to steer what ministers do and the answers that they give in the House in regard to the Gomery Commission.

I have nothing to do with this Minister of Public Works and Government Services. We determined our own opinion and decided—without describing the motion as redundant or useless—that we as a party could not support it as currently worded. We will therefore vote against it. We remain convinced, however, and in agreement with the basic truth that the people who stole the taxpayers' money must be unmasked.

• (1145)

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by greeting my colleagues in the Bloc Québécois, who have decided to oppose this motion today. In my opinion, it is not easy for them to say—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Joe Comartin: I have the support of the Bloc whip. I wanted therefore to salute the Bloc for opposing the motion and say that it was not easy for them to do so and that it is not really easy for us, either.

[*English*]

The basic intent of the motion, if we were to take it on its surface, although there may be some other agenda here, is that if we would be willing to support, and then the “howevers” come. With regard to expressing our disgust for the elements around the scandal that has plagued the government now for a number of years, this is an opportunity for us to be able to say that.

Supply

As with the Bloc, the NDP is confronted with the law of this land, with due process, with the civil liberties and the civil rights of the witnesses and the parties that have come before the Gomery commission. Because of those things, we, like the Bloc, are not able to support the motion. If the mover and the Conservative Party were prepared to be more reasonable we think there may be ways of amending the motion that would draw the support of both ourselves and the Bloc.

I would urge the mover and the Conservative Party to consider the suggestions that we have made so that at least the opposition parties in this House can express our disgust with regard to the elements of this scandal that have plagued the government for some time.

I would like to touch on some of the specific concerns we have. The first concern is the fact that the motion makes some assumptions about the conduct of the inquiry by Mr. Justice Gomery that are probably not valid.

Justice Gomery, in his opening statement, made it very clear that he understood the scope that the federal Inquiries Act gave him. He understood the limitations that were placed on him by previous decisions, most notably the decision in the tainted blood scandal. It was a leading decision by the Supreme Court of Canada in 1997. It has been followed repeatedly by other inquiries, both federally and provincially, that have taken place since 1997. It clearly sets out what the role is of Mr. Justice Gomery and any other commissioner conducting an inquiry under the Inquiries Act.

The motion that we have before the House today would in effect violate, to some significant degree, the protections that were established under that case. I believe there are ways around it if the motion could be amended.

Coming back to Mr. Justice Gomery's opening statement when he started the inquiry, he made it very clear that he knows he has the ability on the finding of fact to make recommendations that will point fingers, if I can put it in a very broad sense, at individuals or groups of individuals. I believe Mr. Justice Gomery recognizes his limitations in this regard.

The Supreme Court of Canada made it very clear that the commissioner, under the Inquiries Act, was not to make findings of criminal culpability and that he should avoid doing that. He also should not use specific language that would make findings of civil liability.

The Supreme Court went beyond that. I think this is really important and perhaps the Conservative member who moved this motion and the Conservative Party more generally could take some appreciation of it. The Supreme Court of Canada went on to say that not only should one avoid making findings of "criminal culpability or civil liability", but if there is in one's findings a public perception that one has done that, one should avoid doing that also.

That is a very difficult criteria and it is one that Mr. Justice Gomery and any other commissioner has to meet. The wording was quite explicit in that decision and the decision is not one people can play with. We cannot slide it this way or that way and get around it. It is there as an absolute barrier, it seems to me, to what Mr. Justice Gomery can do in terms of his recommendations and his findings of fact.

● (1150)

Unfortunately, the motion that is before the House today from the Conservative Party would call on Justice Gomery to make those specific types of findings, which the Supreme Court of Canada has prohibited him from doing.

Given our rules of procedure, it may be possible for the mover of the motion, obviously with the support of his caucus, to make the necessary amendments. We cannot move a formal amendment but we are suggesting that he and his party consider that the recommendations that we are making to Mr. Justice Gomery at this point take into account the Supreme Court of Canada decision and the rules and guidelines that have flowed from it. Obviously I cannot speak for the Bloc Québécois or the Liberals but on behalf of my party I would say that if he is prepared to do that we would be prepared to support, with out vote in the House tomorrow, that type of motion.

If that motion were moved it would give us the opportunity to say to Mr. Justice Gomery that we are looking to him to be as clear as possible in his decision making and in his recommendations and it would give us the opportunity to say to the government that we expect it to then implement those recommendations to their fullest degree.

I want to deviate for a moment and talk about some newspaper and media reports that we had over the weekend suggesting that today's motion may have another agenda. I do not want to suggest that it is the agenda of the mover because I do not know that. I believe he is well-intentioned in this. However I believe there are some members of the Conservative Party who see this motion as a mechanism to be used in some future election or between now and the next election as an attack on us as being too closely associated with the Liberal Party.

The offer I have made here on the floor on behalf of my party is sincere. We are not playing any games with this. We are very much looking to add additional weight to the expression of disgust from this chamber about the conduct that went on around ad scam. We look forward to that opportunity.

If one of the agendas of the motion is to tar us as being too closely associated with the Liberals, then that is an improper strategy and tactic on the part of the Conservatives. They should re-think why they are moving the motion today. Opposition days have a proud tradition of raising issues of importance to this country and allowing us to debate those issues from all perspectives.

However if today's motion is being used for purely partisan political purposes as an attempt to embarrass our party and members of our caucus in some future election or between now and the next election, then that is not proper and it is not in the best tradition of the House. If that is their motivation, I would ask those members to reconsider.

I would like to return to the motion itself and point out some of the risks involved if we proceed with it and if the government passes the mandate on to Mr. Justice Gomery with this wording and Mr. Justice Gomery follows it.

Supply

Before I was elected to the House of Commons I was a practising lawyer for many years. If I had seen this appear as the mandate at this period of time in the course of this inquiry I would be in the federal court almost immediately moving a motion to strike down the entire work of the inquiry up to this point on behalf of my client who would be severely prejudiced. I would be able to make those arguments. Based on the Supreme Court of Canada decision and several others that have come both before and since then, I would fully expect to be successful in bringing Mr. Justice Gomery's inquiry to an absolute halt and would fully expect to receive an order that the inquiry would have to commence all over again.

• (1155)

I am not being extremist in that analysis. I think that just about any lawyer who has practised in the courts of this land and in front of tribunals would agree with that assessment, because what it does is say to the individual witnesses and parties who have participated in that inquiry up to this point, "Sorry about that, but the rules have just been changed".

That is greatly offensive to our common law tradition, our respect for due process and our respect for the charter rights we have in this country. One does not change the rules of the game. One does not change the rules of procedure. One does not at the end of the process change the conduct that, in this case, the judicial officer is required to follow. One sets out the mandate at the beginning. The commissioner, in this case Justice Gomery, follows that mandate. One does not change it at the end of the process.

We expect that we are probably only a week to two weeks away from finishing the testimony. To try justify changing the mandate at this point, in the clear way that is being attempted here, is just totally offensive to our jurisdictional and juridical principles in this country, which we have had for a long time, even preceding the rights that were enshrined in the charter back in 1982. That is what would happen.

It is actually ironic that this motion is coming before the House today, because yesterday the former prime minister's lawyers withdrew on his behalf their objection to Mr. Justice Gomery. Within the court process, it was the last outstanding manoeuvre, if I can put it that way, that might have either brought Mr. Justice Gomery's inquiry to a halt or affected it in some significant way in terms of the findings he could have made.

That objection has now been withdrawn. If we were to proceed with this motion, we would be opening this door all over again. Applications could come from the various lawyers who are already there representing parties. Other witnesses could bring lawyers forward and say, "Wait a minute. I did not understand I was exposed to this risk. I did not get the opportunity to make full comment and make a full presentation. I want to have that opportunity".

The list of potential attacks on the commissioner and on the inquiry is very long. There are parties to this that we in this House probably cannot even contemplate at this point, but certainly there are 50 to 100 of the potential witnesses and parties, from what I can see, who would be negatively or potentially negatively impacted by this.

Let us remember, going back to that Supreme Court of Canada decision, that the court was very clear. It did not want inquiries to expose, even in the public perception, the right of the commissioner to make these kind of determinations that this motion would draw us to.

It is a situation that we in the NDP are caught in. Again, as I said in my opening comments, the Bloc Québécois are caught in the same way. We have been deeply offended by everything that has gone on around the ad scam. We say that as individual members of Parliament, because this scandal taints all of us.

It is clear that this scandal was within the Liberal Party and within the Liberal administration, but the public does not see it quite that simply. The common phrase we hear is, "Well, you're all the same". We get caught in it when something like this happens, so it is a personal offence. Even if we were to ignore the effect it has had on democracy in this country and on our international reputation, it is also a personal offence because we have all been wounded by this.

• (1200)

I do not think we can say in the House, perhaps even as clearly as we would like to, just how offended we are, but that is the reality of what we are confronted with. It makes it that much more difficult, then, to be forced to stand in the House and say, "I am sorry, but our party, the Bloc Québécois, cannot support the motion". I am not entirely sure of its intent. There may be another agenda. If there is, that really is unfortunate.

Let me suggest that if we had the alternative, if we had a motion in the shape to which I am suggesting the Conservatives consider amending theirs, a motion which would recognize the limitations that the Supreme Court of Canada has placed on the role of the commissioner under the Inquiries Act, the debate could then focus more today on the scandal itself.

It could focus more on why we should be asking Mr. Justice Gomery to be as clear as he possibly can in making findings of fact, so that the public, Canadians from coast to coast, based on his report, could make a clear determination as to what happened and how we avoid it ever happening in the future. They would basically be able to reach an intelligent and informed decision in their own minds.

I do not think there is any doubt that in this country right now people have drawn a number of very clear conclusions. Some of them may not in fact be valid. Their anger toward the government of the day may at this point be overblown. Or it may in fact not be realistic and perhaps they should be angrier at the government.

In his report and the recommendations contained therein, Mr. Justice Gomery is going to play a key role if in fact his report is as broad and as clear as possible. The motion before us unfortunately has the major risk of undermining his ability to do that.

Supply

I do not want to put words into his mouth or draw up any decisions by him, but I would at least speculate that if Justice Gomery were faced with this mandate as the motion is worded now he would have serious reservations about his ability to carry through. He would be caught, as would anybody having a minimal understanding of our legal system. Particularly because of his experience, he would be caught between the Supreme Court of Canada saying that he could not do this and the House or this government saying we want him to do this. I have no way of knowing what in fact he would do at that point, but what I do know is that we should not put him in that position.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do take exception to my colleague's suggestion that somehow all members of Parliament are besmirched by this scandal. What is besmirched by this scandal is our democracy, and of course as members of Parliament we care very deeply about the democratic traditions and the democratic values of honesty, responsibility and accountability that are so at risk in this whole mess of the sponsorship program.

I have two questions for my colleague. I am a little surprised when he argues so vociferously that rules cannot be changed in the middle of the game by the Parliament of Canada. It was his party that changed the rules of the budget in the middle of the game by making a deal to prop up the government in exchange for doing just that, for changing the budgetary rules in the middle of the game. I wonder how he explains the contradiction of his party changing those rules and yet somehow arguing that Parliament cannot make a change to rules in another aspect of the game.

The second thing I would like to ask him is to confirm the following. He said that Mr. Chrétien has now withdrawn his objection to Gomery, but I understand that this is simply a delay in his bringing objections forward. In fact, although he is not going to bring objections forward to Gomery at this time, it is open to him to reactivate those objections and bring them back before the court at any time down the road. It could be just before the report or it could be after the report. How can my colleague say that the objections have now been withdrawn and that roadblock is no longer there when in fact there has just been a delay and it is still very much open to Mr. Chrétien to bring forward objections to Gomery?

• (1205)

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure what constituency the member lives in, but if she has not heard the saying that I have, which is that we are all tainted by this, she has a different constituency than I do, because that is in fact the reality.

With regard to the first question, it is an apples and oranges thing to suggest that the process we initiated to deal with issues of a financial nature in this country by incorporating them into a budget bill is somehow changing the rules. That is just not correct. It is quite acceptable to do this. Governments do it all the time, either around budget time or further on in the year. As for saying that addressing pressing issues in this country is somehow breaching the rules, I reject that.

With regard to her question on the tactics the former prime minister may be using, he has every right, as do all the parties and members of the public who may be affected by Mr. Justice Gomery's findings and recommendations, to challenge them subsequently. He

has the right within the existing system to challenge Mr. Gomery in the final arguments as to whether Justice Gomery has demonstrated a bias toward him.

These are all standard rights. The member is a lawyer. She knows those standards. We are allowed to use due process and our procedural rights. In my opening comments I did not suggest that he had abandoned all of those rights, nor would I suggest to him that he do so. He has a right to protect himself, as do all members of this society.

The fact remains that it was a major development yesterday when he dropped that motion to have Mr. Justice Gomery disqualified because of bias. It was a step forward in terms of some certainty that we will get Mr. Justice Gomery's report in the relatively near future, that is, hopefully by the end of this year, so that the Canadian public will have the benefit of his findings and recommendations.

As for whether there are going to be other attempts, either by Mr. Chrétien or by other parties, there is nothing we can do about that, but the development yesterday was a positive one for Canadian people.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have now had the official positions from the Liberals, the Bloc and the NDP. The positions are the same, which is that this motion, if passed, would lead ultimately to the scrapping of the Gomery inquiry. That is the end result, based on the opinions of even Judge Gomery himself, of amending the terms of reference in the middle of a process. As the member just laid out, as a lawyer he would go immediately to court and say that after the fact there had been a change to the rules that protected him.

What is the ulterior motive or the motivation for this motion? The member started off by saying he has waited so long to have his opposition day, which has been delayed, and now he has come up with a motion that is basically counter to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, to the rule of law and due process, to "innocent until proven guilty".

I want the member to confirm again, for the edification of the House and for those watching, that in his opinion this motion ultimately would lead to the quashing of the Gomery inquiry at great expense and disruption and that it may be in fact an irresponsible motion to have put before this place, because in fact it could pass. With a full moon in this place, that motion could pass, and it would be disastrous for Canada. That is my first item.

There is a second item that I want the member to comment on. The member said at the very end of his remarks that he wants the report to be factual in all aspects so that Canadians can reach an informed decision, if I am quoting him correctly. If the Gomery report is based on the rules of evidence and the Supreme Court guidelines with regard to the inquiry process, where there is not the proper cross-examination process that would otherwise be available in a criminal proceeding, how is it that the Gomery report could ever meet that standard so that Canadians could in fact make an informed decision? How can they make an informed decision if they do not have all the facts that a criminal investigation would have?

Supply

• (1210)

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, in answer to the first question, I touched on it in my speech that there were some media reports over the weekend that this motion was motivated by the Conservative Party to attack the NDP particularly in the western provinces and I guess to some degree in Quebec. If that is the agenda, it is regrettable.

For the last number of months, really since the last federal election, my party has been saying that we are here to make this Parliament work. We are prepared to be cooperative and to do whatever we can in that regard. We are not here to play games. If in fact that is the agenda, obviously it has failed as far as the province of Quebec is concerned since the Bloc has also seen its way through.

I fully congratulate the members of the Bloc for the stance they have taken. It would have been very easy for them to say that they are going to ignore the rule of law, the charter and due process and support the motion because they and their constituents are so angry at the Liberal government. I want to congratulate them with as much sincerity as possible that they took the more difficult position. In any event, if that was the agenda of the Conservative Party, at least in the province of Quebec it failed because of the principled position that the Bloc has taken.

With regard to members of the NDP being victims of voting against this motion in the western provinces, which was the other part of the news story, if that is the consequence, again we stand on principle. This motion is not an appropriate one. It is wrong as worded. We again would invite the Conservative Party to change the motion so that we could support it by reflecting the limitations to which Mr. Justice Gomery is bound by law.

With regard to the second question regarding an informed decision, there are a number of possibilities of the Canadian public wanting responses. It could be in some cases that some parties should be charged. Some parties already have been charged. Those trials are starting in October in some cases. Canadians may want money recovered so that civil liability should be pursued, including, as we have heard in the House from all three opposition parties, that the Liberal Party should be one of the parties to pay money back.

The third one is the political consequence. There is political liability. If Mr. Justice Gomery can make his report clear enough without making any determinations that one person should be charged criminally, another one should be sued, and politically the Liberals should be thrown out of government, he cannot do any of those things. However, he can in his finding of fact and recommendations help the Canadian public in reaching decisions in each one of those areas.

• (1215)

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I do not see quorum in the House.

And the count having been taken:

The Deputy Speaker: It took a few seconds to count everyone, but we have quorum.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Niagara West.

Today we are debating a Conservative Party motion which reads:

That this House call on the Government to amend section (k) of the Gomery Commission's terms of reference to allow the Commissioner to name names and assign responsibility.

This motion comes out of remarks made by the Prime Minister on television to Canadians on April 21. The Prime Minister said in that televised message, "Only he"—Gomery—"can tell us what happened and who was responsible". That is what the Prime Minister told Canadians, that only Gomery can tell us who was responsible for all the problems and the mismanagement, the corruption and the improper use of tax dollars in the sponsorship program.

Section (k) of Gomery's mandate reads as follows:

the Commissioner be directed to perform his duties without expressing any conclusion or recommendation regarding the civil or criminal liability of any person or organization—

That is the clear reading of Gomery's mandate. He cannot express any conclusion or recommendation regarding who is liable, whether it is a person or whether it is an organization. I would like to make it clear that Justice Gomery himself understands that he is not able to name names or assign responsibility. In fact in his opening statement he read section (k) which I have just read and then said:

—the Commission may not establish either criminal culpability or civil responsibility for sums of money lost or misspent...it does not have the capacity nor does it intend to do so.

That is what he said. It is very clear that although the Prime Minister told Canadians that only Gomery can tell us who is responsible for the organized activity that defrauded Canadian taxpayers of hundreds of millions of dollars, both a clear reading of his mandate and his own words of interpretation of his mandate make it very clear that Gomery is not able to tell us who is liable, who is responsible for what happened with the sponsorship program. I read again:

—without expressing any conclusion or recommendation regarding the civil or criminal liability of any person or organization—

If only Gomery can tell us who is responsible but his mandate precludes him from telling us who is responsible, we have a problem. We are trying with this motion to fix the problem to in fact ensure that Mr. Justice Gomery, who has spent many months and a lot of money hearing a range of witnesses, can in fact at the end of the day tell us what the Prime Minister has said only Gomery can tell us: who is responsible.

In order for him to do that, we have to change the mandate. We have to get rid of the prohibition in section (k) that says he cannot express any conclusion or recommendation about who is responsible. Otherwise, what is the whole point of this? The Liberals and our friends in the NDP are saying that the rules cannot be changed in the middle of the game.

Supply

•(1220)

This is the Parliament of Canada. This is the highest authority in the land about laws, about procedure and about process. Of course Parliament can redirect Mr. Justice Gomery. The Liberals are so worried about the shaky ground they are on with this argument that they themselves have proposed to bring forward another motion tomorrow. They tried to do it today. They want to bring forward a motion which says that the House confirms that the commissioner has the authority to name names and assign responsibility.

I am not sure how the House could affirm that, given that the mandate says “without expressing any conclusion or recommendation regarding liability”, but somehow the Liberals want us to pass a motion tomorrow saying that he does have this. That is exactly what we are trying to say today, so I am not quite sure why there is the gamesmanship. Either Gomery has the right to name names and to assign responsibility, or as he himself says, he does not. Mr. Justice Gomery says that the commission may not establish either criminal culpability or civil responsibility. It does not have the capacity, nor does it intend to do so.

Something is far wrong here and we need to fix it. We have a very unusual situation where, for the very first time, it is the governing party itself that is being investigated, that is being accused of an organized plan and activities to defraud the taxpayer.

The suggestion by the government that somehow the Supreme Court says we cannot do this is nonsense. The Prime Minister of Canada has said that only Gomery can get to the bottom of this. In fact, the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Public Works have said over and over, “We will leave no stone unturned to get to the bottom of this. We will get to the bottom of this. Gomery will get to the bottom of this”. Then we find out that Gomery cannot. He cannot, at the bottom of this, tell us who is responsible, not only who is responsible in a criminal sense, but who is responsible even in a civil sense. Gomery cannot do that. His mandate says he cannot do that and he says he cannot do that.

We are trying to fix it and keep the Prime Minister's promise to Canadians that Gomery will tell us what happened and who is responsible. All of a sudden there is a great outcry from the government and its friends in the NDP. We cannot tell Canadians who is responsible. Gomery cannot do that. We cannot have a motion that would allow him to do that. This is completely untenable.

We know that the Liberals are worried, because they are trying to bring forward another motion which is completely at odds with the mandate of Gomery, clause (k) and Gomery's own interpretation of his mandate. What is the motion that the Liberals are trying to put forward? Will it change the mandate or will it say that the mandate says something that it clearly does not? Why not just make it clear, as we have done in our motion today, that clause (k) of Gomery's mandate will be amended to allow him to name names and assign responsibility? Either it does or it does not and Parliament can either say it does or it does not.

There is a suggestion that somehow Mr. Justice Gomery would have a problem with this. That again is complete and utter nonsense. Mr. Justice Gomery has heard the evidence. Judge Gomery has

looked at the tapes of the bank robbery. He knows the money is missing. He knows who took it and he knows who drove the getaway car, but his mandate says he cannot tell who grabbed the cash and who drove the getaway car. What we are saying is that is information he has and which he should be giving to Parliament.

I urge the House to support this motion. Let us give Canadians the full truth as they deserve.

•(1225)

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question for the hon. member is around the fact that we have now seen several months of testimony. We have spent millions of dollars of Canadian taxpayer funds to fund the inquiry. We know for a fact that Canadians are very upset and concerned about the information that has come out of the Justice Gomery inquiry.

I have to qualify this by saying that I am no lawyer. However, what I heard earlier in the House was that there had been a Supreme Court decision that clearly set out the parameters for what was allowed in this type of inquiry and that commissioner responsibilities were clearly laid out.

The member for Windsor—Tecumseh talked about the fact that the motion would contravene what the Supreme Court had laid out. Could the member explain how the motion would be seen in the light of previous decisions that have been made by the Supreme Court?

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy: Mr. Speaker, first, the Supreme Court of Canada clearly is not tying the hands of Parliament in getting to the truth in a very serious matter of abuse of taxpayer funds. That was clearly not the intent of the Supreme Court decision.

Second, Parliament is supreme. Parliament itself makes the law. In this case the Prime Minister of Canada himself has told Canadians that only Gomery can decide, can tell us who is responsible for what has happened.

Third, the government itself in the motion it intends to introduce tomorrow, and tried to introduce today, has said that the House confirms the commissioner has authority to name names and assign responsibility.

I am sure the government would not be bringing forward a motion that would fly in the face of what the Supreme Court has said, and that is not the case. In fact, this is a bogus argument, that somehow Mr. Justice Gomery cannot take all the information he has, all the money he has spent, all the time that has been spent and take the last step, the one the Prime Minister says only he can take, to tell Canadians who was responsible for what happened.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is with a heavy heart that we are all here today once again discussing the issue of Liberal fraud, Liberal bribery, Liberal corruption, Liberal theft and overall Liberal mismanagement.

We hear today Liberals trying to find ways to block the public from finding out who was to blame for all this Liberal theft and Liberal bribery.

Supply

As it relates to the subject of Liberal fraud, I want to ask the member a question about this secret clause (k) that was put into the terms of reference. The hon. member has pointed out that there is no reason why Justice Gomery should not be able to point his finger at those who are guilty and expose those who partook in the Liberal fraud.

However, we heard from the minister across the way who told us that Justice Gomery already had that right. Moments later he said that if we were to give him that right, we would derail the entire process that had been set in place for the Gomery inquiry.

I see a contradiction. If Gomery already has the right to point fingers with respect to Liberal fraud and Liberal corruption, as the minister pointed out, then why would our motion in any way inhibit Mr. Justice Gomery's work? If our motion merely restates a right that the minister claims Gomery already has, then he should not see it as any obstruction. It should merely be a reinforcement of the status quo.

Does the hon. member agree that there is a contradiction?

• (1230)

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is correct. Either Gomery has the right and the freedom under his mandate to tell Canadians who is responsible or he does not. I simply point out the clear wording of the mandate that says he does not have the freedom to do that. I also point to his own words that say:

—the Commission may not establish either criminal culpability or civil responsibility for sums of money lost or misspent...

We want to ensure that not only Mr. Justice Gomery but the entire country is very clear that we can expect Mr. Justice Gomery to assign responsibility for what happened and to tell us who should be held responsible and accountable for this betrayal of the values of our democracy.

We are trying in our motion to make that very clear. I cannot for the life of me figure out why every parliamentarian in this House would not vote for this kind of clarity and certainty for Canadian citizens. The Prime Minister himself promised that. Yet the government is prepared to leave doubt on the matter and that is unacceptable.

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to the motion which reads:

That this House call on the Government to amend section (k) of the Gomery Commission's terms of reference to allow the Commissioner to name names and assign responsibility.

Clause (k) of the Gomery commission terms of reference reads as follows:

the Commissioner be directed to perform his duties without expressing any conclusion or recommendation regarding the civil or criminal liability of any person or organization and to ensure that the conduct of the inquiry does not jeopardize any ongoing criminal investigation or criminal proceedings;

As a result of clause (k), Justice Gomery is expressly forbidden to name any person or organization as being responsible for part of the sponsorship scandal. While it is important for Justice Gomery to file his report, the Canadian people have already heard first hand the abuse of the program and the outright thievery by the Liberal Party.

Let me take a few moments to remind my colleagues and all Canadians of the facts of the sponsorship scandal.

It is well documented that the Prime Minister has promised Canadians he would get to the bottom of the sponsorship scandal. It is also well documented that the Prime Minister claims he had no knowledge whatsoever of any wrongdoing. We continually find through various testimony and documentation that this is simply not the case.

Recently the Prime Minister made a pathetic televised plea to Canadians that it was necessary to have Justice Gomery issue his report before an election. This is just another example of dithering and flip-flopping. One example of this was when he called the last federal election for June 2004.

While he said that he was the one who set up the Gomery inquiry, it was also he who took the sponsorship file out of the hands of the public accounts committee. It was he who prorogued the House. Why did he do that?

He ignored the parliamentary process in allowing the public accounts committee to examine all witnesses and release its findings on the sponsorship scandal. He called a snap election before Justice Gomery could ever hear from a witness, let alone create a report for Canadians to know the truth. He told Canadians that those who were involved in stealing their hard earned tax dollars would be held responsible.

The reality of this is that it was the Prime Minister who handcuffed Justice Gomery before his inquiry even began.

Skeptical Canadians only gave the Prime Minister a minority government with which to work. As a result, he was forced to follow through on his commitment to allow Justice Gomery and the sponsorship inquiry to continue. What he strategically omitted from the inquiry's mandate was that Justice Gomery had no ability to point the finger and assign blame.

By including clause (k), the Prime Minister is not allowing Justice Gomery to name names in his final report. This will deny Canadians everything the Prime Minister has promised. Another Liberal promise made, another Liberal promise broken.

This is the worst scandal in Canadian history, but it is not a Canadian scandal or a Quebec scandal. It is a Liberal scandal. Hundreds of millions of dollars of taxpayer money was misappropriated, laundered and mysteriously ended up in Liberal pockets. Even worse, it is Liberal thievery that has strengthened separatist sentiments in Quebec.

If the Prime Minister has nothing to hide and is sincere about getting to the bottom of the sponsorship scandal, he should have no problem allowing Justice Gomery to name the individuals who are responsible. If the Prime Minister's track record of breaking promises holds true, then I would doubt his sincerity.

Since this sponsorship scandal began, week after week, month after month, we have been continually shocked by the depth of Liberal corruption. Just last week we learned from a forensic audit, performed at the request of Justice Gomery, of yet another \$100 million that was funnelled through the sponsorship program. That makes 350 million questionable dollars so far spent by the Liberal government, not to mention millions more on an inquiry that will be able to do nothing more than state the obvious.

● (1235)

Money was stolen from Canadians and this money ended up in the pockets of the Liberal Party and its friends. We know that a separate fund has been set up for \$750,000. However, we also realize, through sworn testimony in recent weeks, that number could be as high as \$2.5 million and continuing to grow.

Now we find out that the Prime Minister finds it necessary to use another million dollars and counting of taxpayer money for his Gomery war room. The Prime Minister wants Canadians to believe the scandal has nothing to do with the current Liberal government. Testimony states otherwise.

In June 1999 the current Prime Minister's Office called the sponsorship program to lobby for a specific firm. Former public works minister and the man in charge of the sponsorship program, Alfonso Gagliano, claimed that the current Prime Minister was fully aware of the sponsorship program.

The man charged with issuing the sponsorship contracts, Chuck Guité, said that the current Prime Minister intervened in the contracting process. Claude Boulay, a man in the centre of the sponsorship scandal, detailed his relationship with the Prime Minister. Mr. Boulay's wife, Diane Deslauriers, the queen of Liberal fundraising in Quebec, also outlined her relationship with the current Prime Minister.

Alain Renaud has stated under oath that the Prime Minister's assistant lobbied for Groupaction to receive sponsorship money. Jean Brault has admitted to funnelling \$1.1 million to the Liberal Party. He has also admitted to having campaign workers on his payroll to disguise their source of income.

The director general of the Liberal Party in Quebec, Benoît Corbeil, has confirmed that he received money from Jean Brault to pay campaign workers during the 2000 election. Daniel Dezainde admitted that Mr. Gagliano referred him to Joe Morselli and the Prime Minister's chief of staff, Jean-Marc Bard, for the financial needs of the party. Jacques Corriveau admitted to receiving about \$8 million in commission on sponsorship projects for little or no work. The testimony goes on and on.

However, this testimony, along with many more facts, would be absolutely worthless if Justice Gomery's mandate is not expanded. If this is the case, then why, under pressure, did the Prime Minister create a trust fund to repay stolen money? The Prime Minister has already protected his interest by not letting the Gomery inquiry investigate public opinion research.

In a recent public accounts committee, when I questioned a Liberal strategist and former chief of staff to the Minister of Public Works, Warren Kinsella, along with Allan Cutler, the whistleblower in this sponsorship scandal, they confirmed that the Prime Minister

Supply

was privy to information of contract fixing to a firm he has close ties to, Earnsccliffe. This would never be revealed at the Gomery inquiry because the mandate conveniently excluded its ability to investigate public opinion research contracts. However, the Auditor General agreed that public opinion research contracting had serious flaws.

Just last week, the findings of the forensic audit shed light on the underhanded procurement of public opinion contracts. This is all information that will never be found in Justice Gomery's final report because the Prime Minister does not want it there. This is not what the Prime Minister promised Canadians when he created the Gomery inquiry. This is not what he continues to promise Canadians. The Prime Minister's promises are nothing more than empty words.

On a daily basis, the Prime Minister or his minions stand in this House and claim that Canadians need all the facts of the Gomery inquiry before they pass judgment. Yet, they will not allow Justice Gomery to lay blame where it belongs. Let us give Canadians a chance to know all the facts, not just the ones the Prime Minister is comfortable with.

The real injustice would be not allowing Canadians to know who stole their money, who let this happen, and who turned a blind eye to it. That is why this motion must pass.

● (1240)

Hon. Walt Lastewka (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the member two questions and I welcome him back after boycotting and filibustering the House. I am concerned that there is misleading information coming from the hon. member. Justice Gomery himself has said:

I am entitled to draw conclusions as to whether there has been misconduct and who may be responsible for it...whether there was political influence involved in the activities and, if so, by whom, to what purpose, and to what effect; whether any person or organization in the Government of Canada gained an advantage financially, politically or otherwise from the activities and, if so who, to what purpose, and to what effect;

Am I to understand from the hon. member across that he does not believe Mr. Justice Gomery and that he is in contradiction with Mr. Justice Gomery? And if he is, the second part of my question concerns clause (k) which was used in Ipperwash by the Conservative government of Ontario; in Walkerton by the Conservative government of Ontario; in the Stonechild case in Saskatchewan by the NDP government; and in the Grange inquiry in the death of infants at Sick Children's hospital by the Conservative government of Ontario.

Is he saying that those were wrong and he does not believe what Justice Gomery has said? I would ask him to answer those two questions.

Mr. Dean Allison: Mr. Speaker, I have only been a member for a year. One thing I have learned from the public accounts committee is that the devil is in the details.

Supply

A lot of what is said or what is not said, or what is written or not written is part of the reason why we get ourselves into this problem. I find it totally amazing that hundreds of millions of dollars could be misappropriated, misspent, stolen and sent to the Liberal Party. When we begin to question ministers and deputy ministers, there seems to be a huge problem with accountability, where the buck stops and who is responsible.

I certainly appreciate the thought process that the member mentions, that Mr. Justice Gomery should be able to draw conclusions. My concern is, that given the fact that the mandate says that he is not allowed without expressing any conclusion or recommendation regarding civil or criminal activity, what will happen should he have a chance to mention that? What will happen? Will someone cry foul? Will someone say "I can't believe that he wasn't allowed to do that. Let's rule him out of order".

Certainly, I have seen enough during my short time in the House to understand that many times the devil is in the details in terms of what is allowed to be done or not allowed to be done.

My response to the hon. member for St. Catharines would be that if indeed Mr. Justice Gomery is allowed to name names, then this motion should not be a problem for people to support if that is really the case. It would then finalize what we suspect in terms of what he should be allowed to do under section (k).

• (1245)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for representing his constituents and standing up against Liberal corruption, theft, bribery and extortion. I congratulate him for having done that.

My question pertains to one particular point the member raised in his speech. The member points out that if, as the Liberals suggest, Justice Gomery is really authorized to point fingers and name names, then this motion at worst ought to be considered redundant. It merely restates a right that the government claims Gomery already has. Would the member please explain that?

Mr. Dean Allison: Mr. Speaker, that is also one of the questions I have. Once again we have heard over and over how Mr. Justice Gomery is allowed to draw conclusions and how he can formulate his response. I guess the question is why is there so much opposition from the government and other opposition parties with regard to the reason why he should not be allowed to name names and assign responsibility?

If Justice Gomery is allowed to do that, then I am not sure why we are spending all this time debating this today, other than I would suspect, as I said before, there is some kind of back door way that the government would look at to get out of this as soon as he begins to name names and assign responsibility.

I would agree with my colleague. Why not pass this to strengthen and reinforce what the government is telling Canadians is something already within Justice Gomery's mandate? Why not let Justice Gomery name names? Why not let Justice Gomery assign responsibility if indeed the government already believes that this is what he can do?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to debate the motion by the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands on section (k) of the terms of reference of the Commission of Inquiry into the Sponsorship Program and Advertising Activities.

The motion asks us to amend section (k) of the commission's terms of reference to allow the commissioner, Mr. Justice John Gomery, to name names and assign responsibility.

My aim today is to have members understand why the House should not call for the amendment of the terms of reference, but rather oppose it, for a number of reasons. The motion is inappropriate, without merit, redundant and prejudicial to the independence and conduct of the commission.

Need I point out that the government established a commission under part I of the Inquiries Act? In other words, it is a commission of inquiry and not a court. It is important to remember and stress this distinction.

Those watching the commission's proceedings on television, following the examinations and cross-examinations of countless witnesses, who know that the commissioner is a judge of the Quebec superior court, might, however conclude that a trial is going on.

Also, the confusion is due in part to the Inquiries Act, which gives the commissioners the same powers as judges. Under section 4, they have the power to summon witnesses, require them to give evidence and produce documents and other things. Under section 5, they have the same power to enforce the attendance of witnesses and compel them to give evidence as is vested in any court of record in civil cases.

However, no section of the Inquiries Act gives a commissioner of a commission of public inquiry the power to render a decision like a judge can. Instead, such commissioners play the role of investigators who counsel or assist the government on matters relating to the good governance of Canada or the administration of public affairs.

This is exactly the case with the Gomery commission. The government established it, and I quote:

—to investigate and report on questions raised ... by Chapters 3 and 4 of the November 2003 Report of the Auditor General of Canada ... with regard to the sponsorship program and advertising activities of the Government of Canada ... and to make any recommendations that he considers advisable, based on the factual findings made ... to prevent mismanagement of sponsorship programs or advertising activities in the future.

We have stressed this numerous times: it is important to our government for the Gomery commission to continue its inquiry, make its recommendations and report back to us. We are committed to following up on the recommendations that Justice Gomery will present in his final report.

The government has acted in accordance with legislation passed by this Parliament, meaning the Inquiries Act, and with the relevant case law by not asking the Gomery commission to determine civil or criminal liability. That is why section (k) in the Gomery commission's terms of reference is not unique; it appears in the terms of reference of other commissions of inquiry.

Supply

• (1250)

[English]

Accordingly, section (k), it states:

the Commissioner be directed to perform his duties without expressing any conclusion or recommendation regarding the civil or criminal liability of any person or organization and to ensure that the conduct of the inquiry does not jeopardize any ongoing criminal investigation or criminal proceedings;

However it does not preclude findings of misconduct against individuals pursuant to section 13 of the Inquiries Act under which the Gomery commission was established and it is this vital distinction that is not appreciated by the members of the opposition.

It is important to understand that a commission of inquiry is not a court or a tribunal. It does not follow the same laws of evidence or procedure that a court or tribunal would observe. No matter how carefully a commission of inquiry conducts its hearings, it cannot provide the evidentiary or procedural safeguards that prevail at a trial.

What we have observed at the Gomery commission is typical of commissions of inquiry: evidentiary rules have been relaxed and people have been summoned by subpoena to testify about their actions and the like. It is important to point out that a commission of inquiry, which sets out to make findings of criminal or civil liability against persons from whom it is compelled testimony, would infringe the fundamental rights of those persons and run a very high risk of being struck down by the courts as set forth in their judgments themselves.

For example, in *Canada, A.G. v. Canada, Commission of Inquiry on the Blood System*, the Supreme Court of Canada stated:

A public inquiry was never intended to be used as a means of finding criminal or civil liability. No matter how carefully the inquiry hearings are conducted they cannot provide the evidentiary or procedural safeguards which prevail at a trial. Indeed, the very relaxation of the evidentiary rules which is so common to inquiries makes it readily apparent that findings of criminal or civil liability not only should not be made, they cannot be made.

I might add that collective or conclusory indictments of the opposition alleging Liberal fraud, Liberal theft and ongoing collective indictments, undermine the foundational principles of the rule of law, which are organized around principles of individual responsibility not collective indictments, which are organized around principles of presumption of innocence not predetermination of guilt and, most particularly, with regard to the Gomery commission, seek to short-circuit the Gomery commission before all the evidence has been heard, before all the arguments have been framed and before conclusions can be drawn and recommendations made by the Gomery commission itself.

What we should seek, opposition and government alike, is the opportunity for the Gomery commission to conclude its proceedings pursuant to the rule of law, make appropriate findings of fact and make appropriate recommendations which would be in the public interest to prevent any actions or misconduct from ever occurring again.

The Supreme Court of Canada held in *Starr v. Houlden*:

The inquiry process cannot be used to circumvent the federally prescribed criminal procedure. It is coercive and quite incompatible with our notion of justice in the investigation of a particular crime and the determination of actual or probable criminal or civil responsibility.

We must appreciate the distinct roles of commissions of inquiry and of courts and tribunals. Commissions of inquiry are not courts of law. This leads to a second reason why section (k) of the terms of reference should not be amended in the way proposed by the hon. member. Simply put, it would jeopardize ongoing criminal investigations and criminal proceedings which I trust the opposition has a shared commitment in seeing that those proceedings continue.

The hon. member's motion regrettably appears to have ignored this important aspect of section (k). As hon. members know, the government referred certain matters to the RCMP for investigation as did the Auditor General. The RCMP has laid charges against four individuals. We have every reason to believe that its investigations are continuing while the hearings of the commission of inquiry have been under way.

Section (k) of the terms of reference ensures that there are no negative consequences from the overlap between the criminal process and the Gomery commission of inquiry as mandated by the courts themselves. Indeed, the courts have discussed the overlap between commissions of inquiry and the criminal process.

• (1255)

In *Nelles v. Grange*, the Ontario Court of Appeal found that although the commissioner was directed to inquire into and report upon the means by which the children came to their deaths, the order in council specifically limited the commissioner by forbidding him to express any conclusion of law regarding matters of civil or criminal responsibility. It further stated that although the commissioner's findings and conclusions would not be binding, they would be considered by the public as a determination and could seriously prejudice any person named in subsequent proceedings, a principle that would be applicable to the present situation.

What the hon. member's motion would have this House do is potentially jeopardize current and future attempts to hold individuals accountable through ongoing and subsequent criminal prosecutions. In a word, this motion would undermine the rule of law, prejudice the independence of the Gomery commission and jeopardize further criminal prosecutions.

[Translation]

I will give the member a third reason why section (k) of the terms of reference must not be amended, namely that of procedural fairness. The motion would change the rules of the game for all parties to the proceedings of the Gomery commission. Most importantly, it would force the government to change the rules not at the start of hearings, but as the testimony is winding down.

With this motion, the hon. member is attempting, involuntarily, it might be said, to expose the commission and the government to legal risks. We could expect the parties to the proceedings to call it unfair, in terms of procedure, to amend the terms of reference of the commission after they have testified. We could also expect long judicial review proceedings to result.

I am sure the opposition MPs are just as impatient as the members on this side of the House to read the final report Justice Gomery is to table in December.

*Supply**[English]*

If members of the opposition anticipate this report as much as we do, then why would they want to propose an amendment that could have, even unintended, the effect of retarding, if not prejudicing, the continuation of the Gomery commission itself?

[Translation]

I want to be clear. The rules cannot be changed in such a way as to put procedural fairness at risk or delay the tabling of the Gomery commission report.

I am coming to the final reason MPs will want to reject this motion: the amendment could be redundant. In other words, to the extent that the motion aims simply to enable the Gomery commission to draw conclusions in determining whether there has been misconduct and who appears to be responsible for it, the commission is already charged with this duty.

On this point, I would remind members what Mr. Justice Gomery said in his opening statement on May 7, 2004:

I am entitled to draw conclusions as to whether there has been misconduct and who may be responsible for it. Such findings will be the focus of the Inquiry only to the extent that they are necessary to carry out the mandate in the terms of reference.

The Supreme Court of Canada has used similar terms:

—the commissioner may have to assess and make findings as to the credibility of witnesses.

and:

—may draw appropriate conclusions as to whether there has been misconduct and who appears to be responsible for it.

The wording of section (k) of the Gomery commission's terms of reference complies with court guidelines, including those of the Supreme Court of Canada. On the one hand, the commissioner must not express any conclusion or recommendation regarding the civil or criminal liability of any person or organization. The courts, moreover, have made it clear that such is not the role of a commission of inquiry. On the other hand, there is nothing to prevent the commissioner from drawing appropriate conclusions with respect to possible misconduct and to say who might be responsible for it. This is a very important distinction and one that is crucial to an understanding of the inquiry process.

In fact, in his opening statement, Justice Gomery made it clear that he understood that possibility was open to him:

Nevertheless, although the commission will not, and indeed cannot, express conclusions or recommendations in relation to the potential civil or criminal liability of anyone, it is part of its mandate to assess the evidence and to make findings of fact, such as findings with respect to the credibility of witnesses. According to s.13 of the Inquiries Act, which will be discussed in more detail later, I am entitled to draw conclusions as to whether there has been misconduct and who may be responsible for it. Such findings will be the focus of the Inquiry only to the extent that they are necessary to carry out the mandate in the terms of reference.

I hardly need remind hon. members that the present government is the one that struck the Gomery commission in a desire to get to the bottom of the situation. We are anxious to find out what is in the report, which is slated to be released in December, and we are determined to implement its recommendations.

If the hon. member's motion to allow Justice Gomery to name names and assign responsibility would allow the commission to

draw conclusions on civil or criminal responsibility, I cannot support this motion.

If I did, I would be ignoring the distinction between the role of commissions of inquiry and of courts. I would risk jeopardizing any attempt to hold those concerned criminally responsible for their actions. I would be changing the rules and that could be detrimental to procedural fairness and prevent the publication of the commission's report. I would be compromising the commission of inquiry itself and its ability to present its report, thereby creating the possibility that it would be abolished on the pretext that it is violating basic human rights. I would be ignoring the fact the Gomery inquiry already has the authority to express pertinent findings on whether there was wrongdoing and who seems to be responsible.

As Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, I must respect the rule of law. Any support for the motion would be given in total disregard for the decisions made by the highest court of the land, the Supreme Court of Canada.

• (1300)

[English]

As I have mentioned, Justice Gomery already has the power to draw conclusions of misconduct against individuals under section 13 of the Inquiries Act. If this is the objective of the proposed amendment, it would be redundant. If, however, as I said, it seeks to assign civil or criminal liability against individuals, such an amendment could jeopardize the inquiry for the reasons already mentioned above. Either way, it is clear that the amendment should be opposed.

[Translation]

I invite all hon. members to vote against this motion since it is inappropriate, unnecessary, unfounded, redundant and detrimental to the commission.

[English]

Mr. Jim Gouk (British Columbia Southern Interior, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have listened to not only the hon. minister who just spoke but other Liberals who have spoken on this motion throughout the day. They seem to keep raising the same theme. On the one hand, they are saying Gomery has the powers for which we are looking. On the other hand, they are saying that it will be wrong to give him the powers for which we are looking. Clearly, what it says is that Gomery cannot recommend charges be laid.

Let us say a bank has been robbed. Let us call it the Bank of Canada. Let us say it has been robbed a number of times. Sometimes it has been robbed by groups of people together. Then other smaller groups not connected with those and various individuals have all gone in at various times and robbed the bank.

Police officers do an investigation. They find some people they think are the culprits in one or more of the robberies. They say, "Here is who we think robbed the bank and we are charging them". It is then up to the crown to prove or not prove their guilt. It is not the police to prove guilt. It is the police officers who recommend that charges be laid based on evidence they have gathered.

Supply

We are asking no more than that of Gomery, to be allowed to recommend charges be laid against certain individuals, companies and organizations which is specifically prohibited under the mandate given to him by the Liberal party.

I would like the hon. minister to tell us why Gomery should not be able to do the same thing that police officers do, without interfering in any criminal cases, and to recommend that charges be laid against specific individuals, groups of individuals or organizations and to do that without any interference. Also after some charges have been laid, police may find that more people are guilty and recommend charges be laid against them as well.

Why can Gomery not do the same thing? Of what is the Liberal Party afraid?

• (1305)

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question because it allows me the opportunity to make a crucial distinction which seems to be lost on those representing the motion. Justice Gomery, as the commissioner, already has the power to draw conclusions of misconduct against individuals under section 13 of the Inquiries Act pursuant to which, as I mentioned, the Gomery commission's mandate has been framed.

Therefore, he can draw in that sense conclusions of misconduct with respect to individuals. With regard to that, if that would be the objective of the motion, it would be redundant. In other words what is the point of amending a mandate to include a power that is already there? That would make no sense and would have prejudicial consequences in the manner in which it might retard or delay the ongoing process of the inquiry in terms of inviting legal challenges and the like because it would come at the end of this judicial Gomery process.

On the other hand, if the motion seeks to assign civil or criminal liability against individuals, such an amendment is prohibited by the rule of law among other things because it would jeopardize the very inquiry for the reasons that I mentioned earlier. It appears from what the member opposite has just said, in terms of recommending charges against individuals, that is what the motion seeks.

Therefore, the hon. member cannot have it both ways. If he wants to amend this statutory mandate of Justice Gomery with respect to allowing conclusions of misconduct to be drawn against individuals, that power is already there. The very proposing of an amendment is not only redundant but prejudicial.

If as it appears from his own remarks he is seeking to convert the Gomery commission into a police type power investigation, that is prohibited by the rule of law. The Gomery commission does not have the power to assign civil or criminal liability with respect to any individual. Should it seek to do what the hon. member just mentioned, it would derail the entire commission of inquiry. It would put an end to any criminal prosecutions. It would undermine all the shared purposes that we have in getting at the truth. Frankly, and I respect his intentions, it would bring about the very opposite of what he seeks, namely to get at the truth in accordance with the rule of law.

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not want to get into a debate with the Minister of Justice on the

jurisprudence as he probably knows a lot more than I do about the issue. However, I want to make a comment because I want it on the record for everyone to see.

When the Prime Minister set up the Gomery commission, he said that he was mad as hell. He told the Canadians that he would lift every stone, through the Gomery commission, to ensure the wrongdoers paid the full price of the law. If I am understanding things correctly today and if the Liberals cannot support our motion, I would say that the Prime Minister of Canada was very close to seriously misrepresenting what Gomery was all about to every Canadian in the country.

When he took to the TV screens a few weeks ago, he presented the same package, telling us to wait for Gomery, that he would get to the bottom of this and that the wrongdoers would pay. What the Minister of Justice has said today is that Gomery cannot charge people, the wrongdoers cannot be brought to justice and it is not within the ambit of Gomery. That is not exactly what the Prime Minister has told Canadians.

• (1310)

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Mr. Speaker, I respect the concern of the hon. member to get at the truth, which was exactly the purpose of the Prime Minister in setting up the Gomery commission of inquiry. The misrepresentation is being made in terms of its attribution not by the Prime Minister but by the hon. member. The Prime Minister understood that a commission of inquiry must be set up pursuant to the Inquiries Act.

Under section 13 of the Inquiries Act, the Gomery commission has the power with respect to determinations of misconduct regarding individuals, but it does not have the power, in and of itself, to engage in criminal prosecution. That does not mean there cannot be criminal prosecutions. In fact, four criminal prosecutions have already been launched. That does not mean that there cannot be civil liability. There have already been civil suits launched with respect to the recovery of assets in the amount of \$41 million.

What the hon. member fails to appreciate is the crucial distinction between the Gomery commission and a court of law. The Gomery commission does not have the power to assign civil or criminal liability. Only a court of law can do that. The Gomery commission can arrive at findings of fact and recommendations which can prevent any pattern of misconduct, identify the misconduct in this case and allow for any such criminal prosecutions or civil liabilities as may be initiated pursuant to the rule of law and the principles of the rule of law to develop in consequence of the Gomery commission's findings and recommendations.

We should at least have sufficient respect for the Gomery commission and the principles of the rule of law to allow all the evidence to be concluded, all the arguments to be framed and all the determinations to be drawn before we seek to make predeterminations of guilt and collective indictment and short circuit the Gomery inquiry, if not jeopardize its independence, its application and its efficacy.

Supply

Hon. Keith Martin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the Minister of Justice for his erudite and learned dissertation on the difference between inquiries and the courts and the powers they both have or do not have. All members of the House and particularly the public would like to ensure that individuals who committed wrongdoings be brought in front of a court of law, be found guilty and be prosecuted.

Could the Minister of Justice inform the public of what could be done to prosecute the individuals who may have committed offences under the Criminal Code as it stands today.

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to the basic principles of the rule of law, where there are grounds to believe that a crime has been committed then a criminal prosecution can be launched. As I indicated, in respect of that, four criminal prosecutions have already been launched. As well civil liability suits have also been initiated.

The crucial point is that within its powers, the Gomery commission cannot initiate a criminal prosecution, recommend a criminal prosecution or initiate civil liability or engage in any assignments of criminal or civil liability. That only a court of law can do.

What the Gomery commission can do is draw findings of fact. With respect to those findings of fact, it can also arrive at certain determinations of misconduct. With respect to those determinations of misconduct, it can name individuals. It can make recommendations with respect to the overall objectives and terms of reference of the inquiry. However, it has to be left to the ordinary processes of prosecution and judgment in the country to do its work. The Gomery commission cannot initiate a prosecution. The Gomery commission can only arrive at determinations of misconduct. If prosecutions are initiated, they can only be initiated in accordance with the ordinary criminal process.

What the Gomery commission will do is shine the sunlight of truth on all that has happened with respect to the sponsorship issue and allow us to finally appreciate what took place, the facts and circumstances, the context and the like and allow the rule of law to run its course.

•(1315)

Mr. Jim Prentice (Calgary Centre-North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Edmonton—Spruce Grove.

I listened with interest to the comments made by the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, and I intend to take full umbrage with his comments.

As I begin my remarks, let me point out that I have been a commissioner of the federal government. I have conducted personally over 25 public inquiries as a commissioner of the Government of Canada in the context of aboriginal land claims, so I am familiar with the statutory framework which applies to commissioners.

I would say to members of this House and to Canadians today that what we are seeing in the Gomery commission is a very clear attempt by the Government of Canada to abrogate the rules that apply normally to public inquiries and to commissioners to tie the

hands of Justice Gomery so that he cannot fulfill his responsibility and name names and assign responsibility.

I intend to make that case and I intend to refer to some of the case authorities which the Minister of Justice referred to.

If I may, I would like to begin with what is specifically before the House today. The motion before the House states quite specifically:

That this House call on the Government to amend section (k) of the Gomery Commission's terms of reference to allow the Commissioner to name names and assign responsibility.

Section (k) at this point of the Gomery terms of reference reads as follows:

—the Commissioner be directed to perform his duties without expressing any conclusion or recommendation regarding the civil or criminal liability of any person or organization and to ensure that the conduct of the inquiry does not jeopardize any ongoing criminal investigation or criminal proceedings;...

How is this to be reconciled with the statements that the Prime Minister has made? The Prime Minister of Canada said on March 13, 2004, as reported the *Windsor Star*:

—I want to get to the bottom of this [sponsorship scandal], I want every single fact to come out and I want every person who has been involved in this to pay the consequences for it...

How are the Prime Minister's statements and his much discussed telecast of several weeks ago to be reconciled with what has been implemented in section (k) of the Gomery commission mandate? They are irreconcilable. The truth of the matter is that this is a Liberal scandal and this Liberal government does not want to get to the bottom of it.

According to these proposed mandates, Justice Gomery can deliver a report but he cannot specifically name individuals. That is a very unusual mandate for a public inquiry. The point I would make is that one only need go as far as the federal Inquiries Act.

The federal Inquiries Act, chapter I-11 of the Statutes of Canada, deals very specifically with the powers of an inquiry officer: the power to subpoena witnesses; the power to subpoena documents; the power to conduct an inquiry; the power to direct others to assist him; and the power to deal with witnesses.

Nowhere in the federal Inquiries Act is there any sort of circumscription such as this one on the powers of an inquiry officer. It is unheard of. It is not part of the federal Inquiries Act.

The federal Inquiries Act says simply this in section 2:

The Governor in Council may, whenever the Governor in Council deems it expedient, cause inquiry to be made into and concerning any matter connected with the good government of Canada or the conduct of any part of the public business thereof.

This is unrestricted. There are no limitations on naming individuals. There are no limitations on assigning responsibility. There are no limitations on who a public inquiry officer operating in Canada may name.

Only one inquiry officer in Canada is limited and that is Mr. Justice Gomery. We have to ask ourselves, why is that? It is because the Liberals do not want to get to the bottom of it.

Supply

• (1320)

Why do they not want to get to the bottom of it? They do not want to get to the bottom of it because the basic fundamental of this is that \$250 million was funnelled into Quebec through the sponsorship program, often with little or no paperwork. One hundred million dollars of that ended up directly in the hands of Liberal communications firms, many of whom did nothing more than pass on documents and cream off a percentage of the money.

Multiple witnesses have testified before Gomery with respect not to their allegations but their confessions. We have people confessing who gave the money. We have people confessing who received the money. In some cases, these are senior people in the Liberal Party confessing to corruption.

To put this in context, the type of corruption we are talking about involves theft of public money, the commission of fraud against the Government of Canada, public money laundering and conspiracy in respect of all of those items. This is the most serious scandal in Canadian political history. We have an inquiry which has been struck but which does not have the statutory authority to get to the bottom of that.

As I have said, I have conducted over 25 inquiries for the Government of Canada as a commissioner in the same sense that Mr. Justice Gomery is a commissioner. Not once did I face something such as section (k) which limited my capacity to make findings, not once. I am aware of no other federal commissioner who has been in that circumstance.

I was disappointed to listen to the comments of the Minister of Justice and the Attorney General in this House, because I believe and I say with all due respect that he has been selective in the comments he made and the case authorities he referred to. The leading authority in Canada on commissions of inquiry is in fact the Krever decision of 1997, which is a decision of the Supreme Court of Canada. It deals very specifically with what an inquiry officer can do, what a commissioner of inquiry can do, what he or she may not do, how the rule of law is protected and the importance of a commission of inquiry having the capacity to get to the bottom of things without impeding either civil or criminal liability.

If I might return to the motion that has been put forward today, it in no way suggests that Mr. Justice Gomery would make findings of civil or criminal liability, but rather that he may be allowed to “name names and assign responsibility”. The law of Canada is very clear that this is quite appropriate.

First I will quote from the summary of the Krever case, where it is stated as follows:

A commissioner has the power to make all relevant findings of fact necessary to explain or support the recommendations, even if those findings reflect adversely upon individuals. Further, a commissioner may make findings of misconduct based on the factual findings, provided they are necessary to fulfill the purpose of the inquiry as it is described in the terms of reference.

There is no problem in law here. There is no reason in law why an inquiry officer cannot name names and assign responsibility.

An hon. member: Whose?

Mr. Jim Prentice: As an hon. member has said, Whose?

Moreover, and I have full respect for Justice Gomery, it would seem to me that a commission of inquiry that cannot name names and assign responsibility is somewhat pointless. Odd, is it not, that this is what the case authorities say and this is what the Supreme Court of Canada has said. Again I will quote the Krever decision at paragraph 38:

—the commissioners have the power to make findings of misconduct. In order to do so, commissioners must also have the necessary authority to set out the facts upon which the findings of misconduct are based, even if those facts reflect adversely on...parties. If this were not so, the inquiry process would be...pointless.

Further, at paragraph 39 of the Krever decision, and this is the Supreme Court of Canada in 1997 that I am referring to, it is stated:

These findings of fact may well indicate those individuals and organizations which were at fault.

Summarizing further in paragraph 39 of the same decision:

—a public inquiry into a tragedy would be quite pointless if it did not lead to the identification of the causes and players for fear of harming reputations...

The law of Canada is quite clear. I believe it is something which I hope the Minister of Justice will take the time to review.

• (1325)

There is no irreconcilable conflict between Justice Gomery having the capacity to name names and do his job on the one hand, and the civil and criminal process taking its natural course on the other. To suggest otherwise is to take this House in a direction that does not reflect the law of Canada.

Let us get to the bottom of this. Let us amend Justice Gomery's inquiry powers so that he can name names and assign responsibility.

The final point I will make is that my friend across the House of Commons, the Minister of Justice, said, “Let us respect the process”. I say, let us respect Canadians. Canadians want to get to the bottom of this. They want to know who is responsible. The way the Gomery inquiry has been set up does not let Canadians get the answers they need.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today there has been some interesting information brought forward, even with regard to the Krever inquiry. The wisdom coming out of the Supreme Court on the Krever inquiry also included that the inquiry is not to make a finding of criminal culpability or criminal or civil liability, and that if the findings were to lead to the public perception that there was criminal culpability or civil liability, the inquiry should not do so.

The member is a lawyer. He is familiar with the rules of evidence, the rules of cross-examination and the rules of legal representation, all of which would be necessary for a criminal proceeding or a civil liability proceeding. What has happened here, it appears, is that the member is trying to suggest that in getting to the bottom of the thing and having what the member has referred to as naming names and finding responsibility, somehow who is responsible is equal to being criminal and that is where we have to go.

Supply

Would he not agree that before we can ultimately get to the bottom of the matter at hand, the Gomery commission must report findings of fact, identify those who were involved and the accountability that they have, but that before it can get to the last step it has to go through criminal or civil proceedings which will respect the rule of law and ultimately determine whether or not there is any guilt?

Mr. Jim Prentice: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member opposite is an individual for whom I have the highest regard. I think he has perhaps clarified some of the comments of the Minister of Justice.

If I may just return to Krever, the decision of the Supreme Court of Canada in Krever summarizes very clearly what the authority of an inquiry officer is, and it summarizes the entire body of Canadian law. I will just refer members to paragraph 57 and the following three matters which are the law of Canada as summarized by the Supreme Court of Canada. This responds to my friend's question. The first item states:

A commissioner has the power to make all relevant findings of fact necessary to explain or support the recommendations, even if those findings reflect adversely upon individuals.

The second item states:

Further, a commissioner may make findings of misconduct based on the factual findings, provided that they are necessary to fulfill the purpose of the inquiry as it is described in the terms of reference.

The third and very important item states:

—a commissioner may make a finding that there has been a failure to comply with a certain standard of conduct, so long as it is clear that the standard is not a legally binding one such that the finding amounts to a conclusion of law pertaining to criminal or civil liability.

Therefore, it is as simple as this. Justice Gomery needs to have the flexibility to go about his important work and to make whatever factual findings he needs to make. He is not there to adjudicate either criminal liability or civil liability. That much is very clear. Nothing which has been proposed for the terms of reference today suggests that Justice Gomery would become a person empowered to assess criminal liability. That is not the suggestion which has been made, but rather that in fulfilling his requirements he can make findings of fact, name specific individuals, judge their standard of conduct and say they are responsible. Then the criminal process will take its course from there. I think the law is very clear.

• (1330)

Hon. Keith Martin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to the hon. member's comments. Obviously he has the same interest in making sure that whoever the people were who stole money will be prosecuted, that the moneys stolen by individuals will be returned and that interventions will be put in place to make sure that public moneys are being spent wisely and effectively.

It is interesting that the Conservative Party members want a comptroller system put into place to make sure that public moneys are being used properly. They want to make sure that the RCMP will be called in and that people will be prosecuted. The fact is that all of those things have been done. We have put in a comptroller system. We have called in the RCMP. People have been prosecuted and more people will be prosecuted.

Does the hon. member not think that the federal government has done the right thing by doing all of what the Conservative Party asked for before it even asked for it?

Mr. Jim Prentice: Mr. Speaker, as briefly as possible I will say no, I do not agree with that.

The Liberal government has played for time from the very beginning. Going right back to 1995, the Liberals were warned that the procurement program was not working. In 1999 the Treasury Board Secretariat warned the then minister. In 2000 a public works audit was brought forward saying that there were problems. In 2002 Paul Martin received a letter from a senior official in the Liberal Party warning him there were problems.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): May I remind the hon. member to use titles, please.

Mr. Jim Prentice: Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister received a letter from the national policy chair for the Liberal Party in 2002 warning him that there were persistent problems and growing rumours. In 2002, three years ago, the opposition in the House of Commons called for a public inquiry for the first time into the sponsorship program. The Minister of Finance at that time indicated that he did not think that was an appropriate way to deal with the issue and that the Auditor General should deal with the issue.

The Auditor General's report followed in 2004. It was not until then, five years after the facts were brought to the attention of the government, that it embraced the concept of a public inquiry. Only then was it prepared to buy into an inquiry that has the significant restrictions of the Gomery inquiry.

Do I believe that the Liberal government has made a serious attempt to get to the bottom of this quickly? Absolutely not. Everything it has done has been done reluctantly. At the end of the day, that speaks to the fact that this is not a national scandal; it is a Liberal scandal.

Ms. Rona Ambrose (Edmonton—Spruce Grove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak in favour of a motion put forward by the Conservative Party of Canada to amend section (k) of the terms of reference for the Gomery commission.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to an opposition supply day motion. I am pleased because this institutionalized democratic right has not taken place in quite some time. This democratic voice was stifled by a government that is fearful of opposition, that is fearful of being held accountable for its actions, and most sadly, by a government that is fearful of the very voters who entrusted its members with the responsibility of governing.

By amending the terms of reference to the mandate of Justice John Gomery, we can take the first step to restoring the faith of the disheartened populace.

[*Translation*]

Canada is currently being run by a government under investigation. To find out what happened to our money, we have to wait for the verdict of the Auditor General, Justice Gomery, the RCMP and the Sûreté du Québec.

Supply

[English]

This is a sad state of affairs and because of it, we are here today to discuss an important opportunity to make sure that this never happens again. By not allowing Gomery to name names or assign responsibility for the largest scandal in Canadian history, his hands have been tied by the same political party that committed the egregious act that he has been commissioned to investigate. This cannot be seen as anything but a deliberate attempt to evade accountability and to avoid responsibility.

Recent public opinion polls have placed Canadians' confidence in their elected officials at abysmal levels. I strongly believe this is something that we must work tirelessly to repair. No longer can we sit idly by while the confidence of the electorate slowly slips away from us here in the House of Commons. The historic democratic institutions of Canada must be free of taint and that is why we are here today.

In fact, it was the Prime Minister himself who stated, "I want to get to the bottom of this. I want every single fact to come out and I want every person who has been involved in this to pay the consequences". We on the opposition side of the House of Commons could not agree more. By empowering Justice Gomery with the ability to get to the bottom of the sponsorship scandal, we will be fulfilling a promise made by our very own Prime Minister.

Many Canadians have long suspected that the Liberal sponsorship program in Quebec was created to finance the Liberal Party with taxpayer funds. When the Gomery inquiry, which is investigating allegations of corruption in the sponsorship program, recently lifted the publication ban restrictions on testimony by an advertising executive, the revelations shocked Canada from coast to coast to coast. It was discovered that an advertising executive used his firm to launder large sums of taxpayer money to fill Liberal Party coffers.

Jean Brault, the former president of Montreal advertising firm Groupaction, provided detailed evidence that he paid \$1 million in kickbacks to the Liberal Party in exchange for receiving multiple contracts for advertising firms in Quebec. Mr. Brault also claimed he was asked to put Liberal Party loyalists on his payroll.

This is a Liberal Party scandal that has touched every Canadian who has seen his or her hard-earned tax dollars allegedly used to perpetrate fraud on fellow Canadians. Instead of bringing the country together, the Liberals have pitted province against province and Canadian against Canadian. The Liberal Party does not represent Canada today, nor does it represent Canadian values.

The Conservative Party believes that the testimony heard at the Gomery inquiry was not an isolated event that can be easily explained away. It was not the work of a few misguided people. This was a systematic and deliberate attempt to divert public dollars to a partisan political purpose and to do so in a way that would subvert election laws and other laws to the benefit of the Liberal Party of Canada.

We are all aware of the systematic misuse of federal tax money by the Liberals: the cost of the gun registry; the HRDC boondoggle, where \$1 billion that was supposed to be spent on job creation went missing; the purchase of two Challenger jets for \$100 million through an untendered contract without providing a need for jets;

and the list goes on. This is not just a matter of misguided policy and wasted tax money. This is a scandal of a much greater and serious proportion.

The sworn testimony to date has indicated that through the sponsorship program, taxpayers' money was being funnelled to Liberal friendly advertising agencies and then directed right back to the Liberal Party of Canada. The past few weeks have seen numerous extraordinary measures taken by the Liberal government to distract the Canadian public from its record of scandal, waste and mismanagement. The past few weeks have seen a remarkable \$25 billion in new spending. Beginning with a backroom deal with the NDP, the government has said anything and pledged allegiance to anyone in its quest to remain in government. Even cabinet posts have become the reward for those individuals who agree to support the government's corruption.

The most serious implication of this scandal has without a doubt been national unity. The irony is that where this advertising program was supposed to bolster national unity, it has in fact seriously harmed the cause of federalism in Quebec. It has also increased the chances of the separatist Bloc Québécois party sweeping all Quebec seats in the next federal election. The state of affairs has become very troubled and the only federalist alternative in the province of Quebec is the Conservative Party of Canada.

Even the NDP has agreed to turn a blind eye to Liberal corruption for a few billion dollars in additional government spending.

• (1335)

What is happening in Quebec is symptomatic of a greater problem the government is facing. Whether it is on the equalization file or by neglecting the fiscal imbalance, the government simply lacks a national vision. While the sponsorship program has damaged federalist fortunes in Quebec, other actions by the government have only fueled the flames. By agreeing to one-off equalization deals, the government has pitted province against province. By treating Quebec as a financial tool in its re-election campaigns, it has only increased the support for separation.

We must not let the Liberal government through the scandal weaken our public institutions, our reputation in the world, or the unity of our nation. The future of our country will not be bright if there is no accountability in government. There cannot be good management of public funds by misleading Parliament and Canadians about how contracts are tendered.

One cannot claim to represent Canadian values if one is not telling Canadians the truth. Canadians today are rightfully demanding politicians accept greater personal responsibility for their actions. In time, the Canadian people will also decide what fate awaits the government.

When the Canadian people do pass judgment on the government, they will be doing so confident that the Conservative Party of Canada will get to the bottom of the scandal and confident that this will never happen again.

I was extremely proud to be at our party's founding policy convention in Montreal this past March where we discussed how our positive vision for Canada can return ethics and integrity back to government.

Supply

A Conservative government would not hesitate to strengthen internal audit functions and comptrollership functions of government so that program delivery matched the intent of the program. This would also allow spending to be measured against objectives. Cost overruns would immediately be brought to the attention of Parliament.

A Conservative government would also make sure that the comptroller general operated in an independent office that reported to Parliament. This would ensure that the highest standards and practices of expenditure management were enforced in all federal departments, crown corporations, agencies and foundations.

A Conservative government would also allow the Auditor General to table reports with the Clerk of the House of Commons when Parliament was not sitting. This policy would have been especially valuable since the Liberal government prorogued Parliament last year to avoid the public receiving notice of the Auditor General's report on the sponsorship program as soon as the injustice was revealed.

The hon. member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville commented, "I've never met anyone in Quebec who has told me that because he saw a sponsorship he has changed his mind" on separatism. This is a powerful statement coming from someone who was active during the aftermath of the 1995 referendum.

This program has become a complete failure from the start. If we are to save something from this, it must be to make sure that it never happens again. After hearing testimony that former Prime Minister Jean Chrétien's aide Jean Carle hid details of a \$125,000 sponsorship deal with phony invoices, Justice Gomery made an extraordinary comment. He mentioned, "If this were a drug deal, it would be called money laundering".

This is a scandal involving determined individuals and a corrupt political party. Justice Gomery must be allowed to name names and assign responsibility for this disastrous happening. Canadians simply cannot stomach that individuals who launder money can just walk away.

The backdrop of this Parliament has without a doubt been the Gomery commission. It has dominated every aspect and overshadowed every happening. Veteran political commentator Rex Murphy noted, "The history books will show this as the Gomery parliament".

By amending section (k) of the terms of reference to the Gomery commission, we can end this. I look forward to all hon. members supporting the motion so that the victims of this scandal, the Canadian taxpayers, can feel relieved that those responsible will have been rooted out.

• (1340)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the first thing I thought of while listening to the member's speech was the reference to Liberal friendly ad firms. It reminded me of the statement made at the Gomery commission that there were two kinds of ad firms in Quebec: separatist ad firms and all others. It also reminded me of evidence given at the Gomery commission that the advertising program under the Conservative government was

handled even worse than it is now. That was also part of the testimony at the Gomery commission.

If we are going to deal with this issue by citing Gomery statements, then we should have to take them all. The most important statements are the opening remarks of Justice Gomery himself who referred to his understanding, under the Canada Evidence Act, as to what he could do. It is clearly to find fact and make recommendations.

All other speakers, including the member's colleague who spoke before her, said clearly that statements coming out of the Supreme Court decision with regard to the Krever inquiry stated that it was improper for the inquiry to find civil liability or criminal responsibility or to in fact create a public impression that such a criminal responsibility or civil liability existed.

If the inquiry is not permitted to find criminal responsibility or civil liability, would she agree that this inquiry can only go so far as to find fact with regard to the evidence, and that to respect the rule of law and due process subsequent criminal or civil proceedings will have to take place pursuant to Gomery's findings in order to bring this matter to the bottom line conclusion that she seeks?

• (1345)

Ms. Rona Ambrose: Mr. Speaker, in response to the hon. member's point about any advertising agencies of any political stripe that have been named in the Gomery commission, I do not support any type of corruption at any time.

The Conservative Party of Canada is a different party. It stands on its own merits today and will vehemently oppose any kind of program that does not have proper oversight and that would in any way lead to any type of expenditure and waste of taxpayers' money.

As I said before, it is important to note some of the positive things the Conservative Party of Canada has been speaking about and pushing for, which I hope the government would take into consideration. Conservatives would like to see the government strengthen internal audit and comptroller functions of the government, so that program delivery actually matches the intent of the program, which is exactly how this particular program failed in the beginning.

This would also allow us to measure spending against objectives and ensure that any cost overruns would be immediately brought to Parliament. Perhaps, if that had been done in the past, this never would have resulted in the dire consequences we are facing now.

As Conservatives, we have also said we want to ensure the comptroller general operates in an independent office and reports directly to Parliament. This would ensure that the highest standards and practices of expenditure management are enforced in all federal departments, as well as in crown corporations, agencies and foundations. I suggest to my hon. colleague that this is something I am sure he would like to see his own government do as well.

Hon. Walt Lastewka (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I respect the hon. member's comments regarding the comptroller general. If I remember correctly, it was a previous Conservative government that did away with that office in early 1993 and in fact this government reinstated it. I hope she was not trying to mislead.

We had much discussion earlier about people being charged and so forth. The people of Canada have been asking whether people are going to be charged or sentenced. Mr. Paul Coffin, the first person charged in the federal sponsorship program, pleaded guilty today to 15 fraud charges. I wonder if she would agree that is proof positive that people are going to be charged. This was as a result of the forensic audit done by special counsel Gauthier. The person was charged, has now pleaded guilty, and sentencing is going forward. Is that proof positive to the member that people will be charged or does she still question that?

Ms. Rona Ambrose: Mr. Speaker, I do not recall saying anything pertinent to the question the hon. member just asked. I will return again to the point that if some of the things that we suggested were followed, we would have never ended up in this situation. That is why taxpayers can be assured that after the next election a Conservative government would ensure that the proper processes are in place so that this would never happen again.

One of the things that I raised in my speech, and I will raise again because I think it is very important, is that a Conservative government would allow the Auditor General to table reports directly with the Clerk of the House of Commons even when Parliament is not sitting in the event of an election. This policy would have been obviously valuable since it was this Liberal government that prorogued Parliament last year to avoid the Auditor General's report on the sponsorship program being made public and not allowing the public to receive the damaging information before going to an election.

• (1350)

[Translation]

Ms. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Repentigny.

Just like my colleague, the hon. member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord and Bloc Québécois whip, I want to reiterate the Bloc Québécois' opposition to the motion presented today by the Conservative Party.

We all want to know who was responsible for the sponsorship scandal, for their actions to be denounced, and for the systematic abuse of public money to benefit a political party to be punished. We want the money that was obtained illegally by the Liberal Party, the money that came directly out of the government's coffers through the federal sponsorship program, to be returned to the public purse. That is what the Bloc Québécois wanted when it presented its motion to create the dirty money trust fund. The hon. member for Outremont likes the expression “dirty money”.

The Bloc got what it asked for. The Liberal government, worried about an impending election, decided to follow through on the decision of the House by announcing a \$750,000 trust on the eve of the confidence vote. The amount in trust is not sufficient. Testimony by Jean Brault, president of Groupaction, alone, led to identification of no less than \$2.2 million that apparently was paid to the Liberal Party of Canada through the sponsorship scandal.

All the questions that the Bloc Québécois asked in the House, the smell of wrongdoing and mismanagement evident in the sponsorship program forced the government to set up a commission of inquiry in accordance with the rules of the federal Inquiries Act.

Supply

The government asked Justice Gomery to do his job without formulating any conclusions or recommendations regarding the civil or criminal liability of any persons or organizations and to ensure that the inquiry with which he was charged did not compromise any other inquiry or criminal proceedings under way.

That is why some witnesses were heard at first in private before the judge agreed to make some or all of their testimony public.

We hope that the judge's report, which should be handed down by the end of the year, will give us an idea of what misconduct there was and who was responsible so that the government can then institute civil or criminal proceedings, as the case may be.

Our Conservative friends, for their part, would like to change Justice Gomery's mandate. It is as if a referee decided to change the rules in the last minute of a game and thereby change the final result. It is unthinkable.

If Justice Gomery's mandate were changed, the witnesses—all of them—would have to be allowed to return before the commission, well informed about the possible consequences of their testimony, allegations and admissions.

Justice Gomery has not conducted his interrogations with a view to laying charges because that was not his mandate. The testimony that has been heard is therefore certainly not complete enough to enable the commissioner to name the people responsible.

It should be said as well that the Gomery commission's work is based on a promise: the witnesses are encouraged to reveal all in exchange for a promise that the judge will not make any recommendations regarding the civil or criminal liability of individuals. This promise cannot be broken along the way. That is why we oppose the motion now before us.

The Gomery commission's mandate is to cast a wide net so that we learn all there is to know. Individuals like Marc-Yvan Côté, a well-known Liberal and former Liberal minister in Quebec, admitted before the commission that he received \$120,000 in cash to help the orphan ridings in eastern Quebec during the 1997 elections with the avowed purpose of beating the Bloc Québécois.

In its edition of May 6, the newspaper *Le Devoir* said the following and I quote: “This money was poured into solidly Bloc ridings—so-called orphan ridings, in Liberal parlance—during the 1997 election.”

• (1355)

Le Devoir also mentioned, “This dirty money is not recorded in the party's financial statements, in violation of the Election Act. There is an irregularity, and I admit it. ...Mr. Commissioner, there was no receipt. ...No one knew about it,” said Mr. Béliveau, the first honourable man in the Liberal Party to take the blame for that party's secret funding”.

S. O. 31

This admission shook the Liberal organization in my riding. The Liberal executive and the 1997 candidate feel they have to justify themselves by telling the local press that their riding was not one of the ones that received a brown envelope. The fact is that, in 1997, the local Liberal candidate kept a very low profile; instead the Liberal Party hierarchy campaigned against me, headed by Alfonso Gagliano, who travelled through Drummondville on a regular basis.

In 1997, 2000 and last year in 2004, the Liberals bit the dust in Drummond, a sovereigntist stronghold. The CJDM radio station conducted a poll recently and asked the following question, "In light of the sponsorship scandal, do you want Quebec to become sovereign?" Survey results showed 69% of respondents saying yes, which is in keeping with the results of the referendums held in Quebec.

That said, Commissioner Gomery must be able to table his report as soon as possible and have all the latitude he needs to get to the bottom of things.

Once the report has been read by us and by the public, the RCMP, the Chief Electoral Officer and the Department of National Revenue will be responsible for laying charges.

Since the Prime Minister, in his official address, made a commitment to voters to call an election within 30 days of the tabling of the report, I believe that it will ultimately be the public's decision to punish the political operators behind this scandal, as it did in the 2004 election.

We cannot stress often enough that the sponsorship scandal is not a Quebec scandal. It is a Liberal scandal, concocted by individuals working for the Liberal Party. The Gomery commission and even the courts are hearing evidence of this.

This morning, the former head of Coffin Communication, Paul Coffin, pleaded guilty to 15 counts of fraud. Mr. Coffin's advertising agency received approximately \$8 million in Public Works sponsorship contracts, from which his income was \$2.7 million. When he testified before the Gomery Commission, Mr. Coffin admitted that the bulk of that \$2.7 million had been obtained with fake invoices as requested by the senior public servant in charge of the sponsorship program, Charles Guité.

Coffin Communication served as a conduit for a multi-million dollar advertising campaign on health care. In 2002, the Privy Council Office wanted to retain the services of an agency called Gingko, but that Toronto company did not have accreditation. In order to get around the rules for awarding contracts, the Department of Public Works used Coffin Communication as the middleman, which netted the agency close to \$160,000 for doing absolutely nothing.

Mr. Coffin's admission of guilt clearly proves the Liberal government's negligence in the way it managed the sponsorship program. It confirms the Auditor General's concerns. She clearly expressed reservations about the way that program was being managed in her 2003 report.

The revelations that moved the Prime Minister to terminate the sponsorship program, to set up the Gomery Commission, to institute legal proceedings in order to recover the money and to dismiss

Gagliano and the heads of the crown agencies involved in the scandal ought to be sufficient proof to enable him to pay back all the dirty money, that is the \$5.3 million, not just the current \$750,000.

As for the Conservative Party's motion, out of respect for those who testified before the commission and in order to avoid causing them harm, the Bloc Québécois will be voting against this motion.

• (1400)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): It being 2 p.m., we will now proceed to statements by members.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

PETERBOROUGH MEMORIAL CENTRE

Hon. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Peterborough Memorial Centre is the home of the Peterborough Petes and of the Lakers, the 2004 Mann Cup champions. It is also the home of the Peterborough Sports Hall of Fame and a focus for a wide variety of community activities.

However the people of Peterborough never forget the centre was built as a memorial to the veterans of World War II. Since then, it has become a memorial to all veterans.

Last year our memorial centre was refurbished and modernized. Following this, local veterans groups, notably the Legion, organized a rededication ceremony. In the presence of the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, this historic building was dedicated again to the veterans in whose name it was built. This was a dramatic and moving occasion.

I congratulate all those responsible for the rededication. Next week, in this Year of the Veteran, there will be a special ceremony in the presence of Prince Edward to recognize the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II. We should never forget those to whom our Memorial Centre is dedicated.

* * *

CANADA POST

Ms. Diane Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 1994 the Liberal minister responsible for Canada Post claimed that, "As long as this Government is in power, no rural or small town post office will close".

In spite of this Liberal promise, countless rural post offices have been closed or are facing closure.

In my riding of Haldimand—Norfolk, residents of Lowbanks have seen their post office closed and the towns of Clear Creek and York may be next on the list. These post offices have provided a valuable service to my constituents for decades.

Since 1997, Canada Post has recorded profits and dividends of almost \$1 billion. Despite these profits and promises, the Liberal government continues to close rural post offices. Our rural communities deserve better.

In the words of my constituents, “hindering and interrupting an important service such as this is just not acceptable”.

* * *

MEMORIAL CUP HOCKEY TOURNAMENT

Mr. Pat O'Brien (London—Fanshawe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Sunday, the London Knights completed a dream season by winning the Memorial Cup 4-0 over the Rimouski Oceanic. Their combined record for the 2004-05 season and playoffs was 79 wins, 9 losses and 2 ties. Londoners are especially proud that this outstanding achievement occurred in the Year of the Veteran and in the 150th anniversary year of the City of London.

This record shattering team was fashioned by Mark and Dale Hunter. Led by Captain Danny Syvret, MVP Corey Perry, emotional leader Brandon Prust, Dylan Hunter and goalies Adam Dennis and Gerald Coleman, the Knights went undefeated at the Memorial Cup tournament.

As the MP for London—Fanshawe, along with my colleagues, the Minister of Labour and Housing, the MP for London North Centre and the member for London West, I congratulate the champion London Knights and the entire community of London for an outstanding season.

The Prime Minister and the London MPs will be pleased to welcome the team to Parliament Hill in the near future to more officially celebrate their remarkable season.

* * *

[Translation]

GUY TARDIF

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on May 24, we lost a major builder of modern Quebec, Mr. Guy Tardif.

Guy Tardif was an RCMP officer with a Ph.D. in criminology from the Université de Montréal. He remained with the RCMP until 1976, when he was elected to the National Assembly as the member for Crémazie under the PQ banner.

René Lévesque immediately appointed this highly intelligent man minister for municipal affairs. History will recall minister Tardif's greatest achievement, however, as the Corvée-habitation program, which successfully got unions and entrepreneurs working together on the noble cause of providing the less fortunate with decent housing.

After nine years of public service in the Quebec government, he settled in Saint-Denis-sur-Richelieu where he founded, along with his wife, Ghislaine, and their children, the Clos Saint-Denis orchard and vineyard. They developed and promoted such specialties as the famous Pomme de glace, an apple ice wine which won numerous awards.

On behalf of my Bloc Québécois colleagues, I extend my sincere condolences to the family of Guy Tardif.

S. O. 31

[English]

CANADA-UKRAINE INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for the last two centuries Ukrainians have come to Canada in search of a new life.

Generations of Ukrainian newcomers have made significant contributions to the building of Canada, one of the most successful democracies in the world.

Ukrainians have enriched the cultural mosaic of Canada with their unique heritage.

This spring, the Canada-Ukraine parliamentary program celebrates 15 years of work in the Canadian Parliament with the arrival of 28 students from 15 universities in Ukraine and Georgia.

For the past 15 years the House of Commons has welcomed a generation of young Ukrainians who have all had a chance to personally experience life in a civil society and to see democracy in action.

By taking an intern, members of Parliament contribute to the best kind of foreign aid a democracy can give to the future leaders, namely, the opportunity to observe firsthand the work of a democratic Parliament in an open society.

* * *

● (1405)

JUNIOR HOCKEY PROGRAM

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, three years ago the Prince Albert Raider junior hockey program was in trouble. That is not the case today. Today, Prince Albert has a fully modern hockey facility called the Art Hauser Centre.

The Raider hockey team, under coach Anholt, has completed an immensely successful season. Attendance is up and hockey enthusiasm is back in full scale.

Three years ago certain hockey leaders took the bull by the horns and initiated a program called “Bring Back the Magic”. This campaign has been a resounding success.

Recently, the leaders of this campaign, Gary Anderson, Vic Lemieux, Terry Simpson and Ab Pelligrini, were honoured by the people of Prince Albert for an outstanding job.

Once again Prince Albert is known as Canada's “Hockey Town North”. It is a privilege to acknowledge the outstanding work of these hockey leaders.

In terms of the Memorial Cup, this may have been the year for the London Knights but next year I think it could be the year of the Prince Albert Raiders.

S. O. 31

CANADIAN BUILDING TRADES COUNCIL

Mr. Russ Powers (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week, Ottawa is host to the legislative conference of the Canadian Building Trades Council. Through its efforts, this and virtually all buildings in which we reside, work or play provide the type of lifestyle that we as Canadians have come to expect. We thank the council for its endless contribution to our society.

I wish to give special recognition to the Labourers International Union of North America. From its humble beginnings in 1903 and with a current continental membership in excess of 800,000, this organization has contributed in a meaningful way to our way of life. Not only are its members the fuel for our economy, but they contribute in a very positive manner through their volunteer and philanthropic efforts.

I would be remiss if I did not recognize the officers and staff of the central and eastern Canada regional office headquartered in Hamilton, Ontario. I would like to personally thank their former and current international vice-president and regional managers respectively, Enrico “Henry” Mancinelli and Joseph S. Mancinelli, for their belief in and commitment to Canada in general and Hamilton region in particular.

* * *

[Translation]

CENTRE D'ACTION BÉNÉVOLE LES P'TITS BONHEURS

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, recently in Saint-Bruno, some 200 people attended a benefit concert by the Montérégie youth symphony orchestra at the Centre Marcel-Dulude, to raise money for the Centre d'action bénévole Les p'tits bonheurs.

It was an enjoyable way to do something useful. The useful or essential part was raising funds for this volunteer centre in downtown Saint-Bruno, which desperately needs to expand its facilities in order to meet a growing need for all sorts of community services: a used clothing store, meals on wheels, assistance for seniors and young families, to name just a few.

The enjoyable part was listening to the concert put on by the hundred or so members of the Montérégie youth symphony orchestra. Their beautiful music made our hearts soar and helped us leave our cares behind.

Congratulations to the two “conductors”: Gaby Bouvrette, director of the Centre d'action bénévole Les p'tits bonheurs; and Luc Chaput, conductor of the Montérégie symphony orchestra, for this delightful evening.

* * *

B. FERNAND NADEAU

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the people of New Brunswick, and Edmundston, especially, were deeply saddened to learn of the death yesterday of B. Fernand Nadeau, a former minister of the Province of New Brunswick and the former mayor of the City of Edmundston.

B. Fernand Nadeau was committed and active in his community. He served as mayor of the City of Edmundston from 1963 to 1969. He contributed considerably to New Brunswick's development between 1967 and 1970, while he was the member for the Edmundston region in the New Brunswick legislature and then minister of municipal affairs and minister of labour in the government of the late Louis J. Robichaud.

I would therefore like to offer sincere condolences to the family and friends of B. Fernand Nadeau on behalf of myself and the people of Madawaska—Restigouche.

* * *

[English]

MARTIN DONALD JONES

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 61 years ago a teenage seaman of the Royal Canadian Navy volunteer reserves was serving on the L.S.I. *Prince Henry*, a landing craft carrier stationed offshore Normandy, France.

Under a halo of bursting enemy shells and clouds of smoke from the ship's guns, the invasion of Europe was underway on Juno Beach.

On the *Prince Henry*, able seaman Jones did his part, providing gunnery coverage for the landing craft, laden with regimental soldiers of the Regina Rifles and of the Canadian Scottish, heading to Juno Beach.

After the war, Martin Donald Jones came to Edmonton and worked for 29 years until retirement in 1985 for Canada Mortgage and Housing, serving another tour of honourable duty for the public of Canada.

My good friends, Marty and his wife Pauline, are celebrating life's blessings and Marty's 80th birthday together with family and friends in Edmonton this week.

I send my congratulations to Marty and wish him good health and God bless.

* * *

● (1410)

THE BUDGET

Mr. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, mayors from across Ontario, including Mississauga and Brampton, want the 2005 budget passed. They want better roads, improved transit systems and more sustainable infrastructure.

This explains why the mayor of Toronto and the mayor of Ottawa appealed to all parties to pass the budget. Similarly, this explains why mayors issued a statement which said, “Cities across the country have worked too long and too hard to see the new deal wiped out by political posturing”.

There are billions of dollars already spent in the 2005 budget for child care and money for economic development for communities in northern and rural southern Ontario.

I agree with the mayors that the interests of Ontarians must come before political posturing. Rather than sit on the budget in committee, let us get the budget adopted so cities and communities across Ontario can start to reap the benefits of the 2005 budget.

* * *

NATIONAL DAY AGAINST HOMOPHOBIA

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, June 1 is National Day Against Homophobia, and our leader and members of the federal NDP caucus stand in solidarity with the GLBT and queer community to speak out against prejudice, discrimination and homophobia.

We congratulate Fondation Emergence and its partners across the country for its courageous and sustained work to end discrimination based on sexual orientation and to promote equality, diversity and openness in our society.

We in the NDP are fervently committed to equality of all people and the recognition of diversity as a wonderful and affirming value of our society. We want to see the day finally arrive, and soon, when the rights of same sex couples to marry are passed into law. We want to see the day when homophobia is something unknown, when gays and lesbians can be who we are, with pride, love and support and without the fear, hatred and violence that comes from homophobia.

We mark this day in a solemn way and we also celebrate the tremendous achievements that have been made.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Russ Hiebert (South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we need a justice system that will make the punishment fit the crime. Let us consider the case of Herbert Ward.

A rapist, Ward has been convicted of sexual assault more than 24 times in a devastating criminal career stretching back 24 years. Yet over that period Ward has spent only 51 months in prison.

In 2003, when Ward last pleaded guilty to a string of sexual assaults, the crown sought dangerous offender status to help keep the serial predator locked up. “No way,” said the judge. These crimes did not meet the threshold for dangerous offender status.

Now this Scarborough rapist has struck again, according to a woman who says that she was his victim on Friday.

How many more women will be victimized before the Liberal government introduces mandatory minimum sentences for violent and repeated offences? How many more women will be victims before the Liberal government acts?

* * *

[Translation]

THE BUDGET

Mr. Guy Côté (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when the budget was presented in February, the Prime Minister missed a good opportunity to respond to the urgent needs of Quebec, which is no longer able to balance its budget, while the federal government is literally swimming in money.

S. O. 31

In addition to being denied categorically in the budget, the fiscal imbalance has become a political imbalance, where the Liberals use billions of dollars to meddle with impunity in areas under Quebec's jurisdiction.

With \$47 billion snatched from the EI fund, there is still no independent fund. As for implementation of the Kyoto protocol, the Liberal government preferred to give the major polluters a blank cheque rather than promote the polluter-pays principle.

The Bloc Québécois will submit amendments in committee that are serious and important for the people of Quebec. Let us hope that the Liberal members from Quebec will see reason and vote for them.

* * *

[English]

NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY

Mr. John Duncan (Vancouver Island North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP are contemplating new demands to present to the government in return for propping it up. Its members must have been reading press clippings from 1973 when the minority Liberal government survived only by catering to NDP demands which included a freeze on Canadian oil prices and the creation of the national energy program.

The NEP froze oil prices and taxed oil exports from western Canada to subsidize imported oil used in eastern Canada. Then NDP leader David Lewis called these measures “a victory beyond my expectations”.

The NEP was a disaster for western Canada and the NDP influence started explosive federal spending and deficits which lasted for 20 years.

The tax and spend NDP are once again making deals with the devil. Canadians should hold on to their wallets.

* * *

● (1415)

[Translation]

CHILD CARE

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, five provinces, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Nova Scotia, have signed child care agreements with the Liberal government.

These agreements are part of the promise made by our government to provide \$5 billion over five years for creating an early childhood education and child care system in every province and territory.

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Adoption of the budget at second reading has brought us one step closer to securing the funding for child care. The budget bills are now before the finance committee and Canadians want all political parties to put the public interest first and support Bill C-43 and Bill C-48.

As the chair of the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada said:

Children and families right across Canada are now being held hostage to political opportunism...We need an activist Parliament to get the things done that matter most to Canadians, such as putting in place the foundation for a pan-Canadian child care system...

Let us get on with this budget, get on with the process and give Canadians the national child care program they deserve.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD*[English]***MEMBER FOR NEWTON—DELTA NORTH**

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister claims he was unaware of negotiations between his office and opposition MPs. Yet the records show that his chief of staff and his health minister make it clear that the Prime Minister wanted to meet with the member for Newton—North Delta.

How can the Prime Minister say that he was unaware when he was prepared to meet with the member for Newton—North Delta the evening before the vote?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, both statements are untrue.

First, yesterday in the House I said that when the member approached the government, I was obviously informed. Second, at no time, however, did I ever say that I would meet with the hon. member. In fact, if one looks at the newspapers, they have said that the hon. member's story is totally false.

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government keeps claiming it did not try to buy opposition support, but the records released today show that is not true.

How does the Prime Minister explain that his government's representative called the member for Newton—North Delta no less than 23 times in the 3 days preceding the vote?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, how does the opposition explain that Mr. Sudesh Kalia, who describes himself as a friend of Mr. Grewal and who was the intermediary, said that Mr. Grewal asked him, according to the paper, to set up the meeting?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The Prime Minister knows he must refer to hon. members by the names of their constituencies rather than by name. I know he will want to make that correction and avoid that problem.

Right Hon. Paul Martin: Mr. Speaker, the third party, who was asked by the member for Newton—North Delta to set up the meeting, said that Mr. Kalia called the member's version of the events totally false. He said:

He gave me a few demands (about) what he's looking for... He's looking for his wife...(to get) a Senate post or UNO representation and himself in cabinet.

The third party said that the member's version was totally false.

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think the records will show that Mr. Kalia is no third party. He was speaking on behalf of the government.

It is quite clear from the records that the government was prepared to make offers to members in the House in exchange for their vote.

Is the Prime Minister denying that the voices on these tapes are those of his chief of staff and his health minister?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have already said that I have not heard the tapes.

What I have done is read the transcript from the third party who was asked by the member to set up the meeting. I have also talked to the ministers of the government and the statement is absolutely clear that no offer was made, that an offer was solicited. No offer was made and that is the truth.

* * *

● (1420)

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Mr. Peter MacKay (Central Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as so famously quoted, the Prime Minister would not know the truth.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I did not hear the first part of the hon. member's comments, but I wish hon. members would refrain from personal attacks. There is no need for it and I think we can avoid this kind of disorder if hon. members would show a little better behaviour in terms of personal attacks on each other. There is no need for it.

Mr. Peter MacKay: Mr. Speaker, last year before shutting down a parliamentary inquiry into the sponsorship scandal and calling a pre-emptive election, the Prime Minister said that there had to be political direction into the Liberal sponsorship scandal.

He also said that Gomery would get to the bottom of it and it would have no limits. Yet the terms of reference deliberately disallow Justice Gomery to name names or identify political direction.

Why did the Prime Minister hide information before the last election and why is he now limiting Gomery's findings of responsibility of political direction by his party?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on February 20, 2004, the hon. member for Central Nova said this about Justice Gomery's mandate:

Well, they're certainly broad. There's no denying that the early indications are that the terms of reference will allow people to go where they have to go.

Oral Questions

The hon. member was right then, but his party is wrong today with its opposition day motion. The fact is Justice Gomery does have the right and the ability, through section 13 of the Inquiries Act, to name names and to assign responsibility.

I would urge the hon. member to go back to planting potatoes and stop planting seeds of doubt about the work of Justice Gomery.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. I urge my previous statement about personal attacks on all hon. members and would ask that we perhaps refrain from this sort of comment in the House. It does not help maintain order in this place.

The hon. member for Central Nova now has a supplementary question.

Mr. Peter MacKay (Central Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at the end of the Gomery commission Canadians want to know who was responsible for the largest political scandal in Canadian history. The Prime Minister states that only Gomery can do that. That is not true.

The terms of reference prevent Justice Gomery from indicating criminal or civil liability and nowhere else is he specifically empowered to name names or assign responsibility. That is a curious fact. The justice minister maintains that expanding the terms might interfere with other processes. That is not true either.

Can the Prime Minister tell us if there are past or present members or employees of the Liberal government or his party currently under investigation by the RCMP?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, Justice Gomery describes his mandate in his own words. He said:

According to s.13 of the Inquiries Act, which will be discussed in more detail later, I am entitled to draw conclusions as to whether there has been misconduct and who may be responsible for it.

Further, Justice Gomery said:

—whether there was political influence involved in the activities and, if so, by whom, to what purpose, and to what effect;

whether any person or organization in the Government of Canada gained an advantage financially, politically or otherwise from the activities and, if so who, to what purpose, and to what effect;

Justice Gomery is right. He does have the mandate to name names and assign responsibility.

* * *

[*Translation*]

MEMBER FOR NEWTON—NORTH DELTA

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to tell the Prime Minister that, in the matter involving his chief of staff, I do not need any kind of parliamentary immunity to make the same remarks, both inside and outside this chamber. That having been said, it is absolutely unbelievable that, two weeks later, the Prime Minister continues to maintain that he has not heard the compromising tape.

At a time when full explanations are required, will the Prime Minister admit that, in the matter involving his chief of staff, he has been absolutely and totally negligent?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if I did not hear the tape, it is because I do not have it.

• (1425)

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would imagine that he has a radio or a television set in his office. Because it has been aired on radio and TV, and a translation has been published in newspapers.

In his address to Canadians and Quebecers, the Prime Minister made the following statement about the sponsorship scandal. “I am sorry that we weren’t more vigilant, that I wasn’t more vigilant”. If proven, the actions of his chief of staff may be actionable under section 119 of the Criminal Code.

Will the Prime Minister learn from past mistakes, stop being deliberately blind, show vigilance and suspend—

The Speaker: The right hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, I would ask the leader of the Bloc Québécois to just take a look at what Mr. Kalia said. He was the third party, between the member and the government. Mr. Kalia said that no offer was made by the government, that the member was the one who made demands, which were refused outright.

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is protecting his chief of staff by claiming that it was the Conservative member himself who approached his government and offered his vote in exchange for some compensation.

Will the Prime Minister admit that, regardless of who made the initial move, what matters before the law is what was said and, in this regard, his chief of staff may have contravened section 119 of the Criminal Code?

[*English*]

Hon. Tony Valeri (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has said that he was in fact informed that the member for Newton—North Delta approached his office about crossing the floor. He also said that he was very clear that there would be no deals offered.

The hon. member was making an accusation that there has been some type of criminal intent here. Certainly, the RCMP, as an independent body, determines what it will investigate and based on what evidence.

If the hon. member has any information that would suggest that an investigation is merited, I would suggest that he provide that information. In fact, he has an obligation to provide that information.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister’s chief of staff said “you can stay home, stay back where you are or if you like, we can make an arrangement that allows you to move”.

How can the Prime Minister deny that the content of this recording is suspicious enough to warrant swift action regarding his chief of staff? Let the Prime Minister suspend him immediately.

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Tony Valeri (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, the hon. member is making accusations. I understand that the transcripts have now been made public. I do not understand why it took so long for the official opposition to make them available.

Nonetheless, as the Prime Minister has said, there was no offer and no deals made. In fact, it was the member for Newton—North Delta who approached the government. The Prime Minister has made it very clear that we in no way look to entice anyone to join this party.

[Translation]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, over the past six weeks, two Liberal ministers, one parliamentary secretary, the lawyer representing the Liberal Party at the Gomery commission and the Prime Minister himself have all boasted about calling on the RCMP. However, when the issue involves the Prime Minister's chief of staff and a Conservative member, their enthusiasm for the RCMP seems to wane. Could the Prime Minister tell us why?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am a little surprised that the NDP leader would not know about the ethics involved in all this. The government does not have the right to give instructions to the RCMP. It can provide information, as any individual can, but the decision to act on this information rests with the RCMP.

• (1430)

[English]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I believe we can all recall previous instances where the RCMP was called in by the government.

It is funny because on sponsorship the Prime Minister did nothing because he claimed that he did not know anything. In this case, he is doing nothing because he does not want to know anything. It is not a funny matter. The RCMP needs to investigate this. It is going to need all the relevant phone logs, e-mails, letters and meeting notes.

My question for the Prime Minister is, will they be provided to the RCMP?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, obviously the government will provide the RCMP any information it requires. I would hope that if the leader of the NDP has any such information, he would provide it.

What I find most surprising is that the Leader of the Opposition seems to imply that Canada is a police state, that in fact we will dictate to the RCMP what it should do. That is not the way it works. It would be most improper if the government were to tell the RCMP to initiate an investigation. It should be provided with the information and then an independent decision of the RCMP is taken on whether or not to act.

* * *

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today we learned the government has made a deal with former Prime

Minister Chrétien, the kind of deal the public works minister yesterday suggested in the House might be characterized as witness tampering and trying to interfere. The minister said that kind of deal would be shameful. The government's deal is that Chrétien will not try to remove Gomery for now but may do so later.

Why today a deal the minister scorned just yesterday?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's assertion is ridiculous. The fact is that Mr. Chrétien, as an individual, has a right to defend himself and to take action as he sees fit.

The government has been clear. It did not agree or support Mr. Chrétien's previous action. He has decided to take another action. That is his right. We believe in the charter of rights and we believe in the freedom of individual Canadians to defend themselves under our system.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this deal and reprieve from the Chrétien application to remove Gomery is only temporary. It can be brought back any time and hangs over the head of the inquiry. Did the government's deal include waiting to see what Gomery says before deciding whether the Chrétien attack will proceed?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again the hon. member's question and assertion are totally false. There was no deal. Mr. Chrétien, as an individual, has determined a course of action and he has the right to pursue that. The government has also chosen a course of action.

The Prime Minister has chosen a course of action and that is to support the work of Justice Gomery. The only people in the House who are acting in a way that could potentially disable and disrupt the work of Justice Gomery are the Conservatives. Their opposition day motion today is at best disruptive or redundant and at worst mischievous and aimed at disrupting the work of Justice Gomery.

[Translation]

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the lawyers representing Jean Chrétien have suspended their application to have Mr. Justice Gomery dismissed, because they have an agreement with the Liberals. They reserve the right to submit their application again and delay the release of the judge's report. The lawyers representing the government have agreed to this.

Will the Prime Minister commit to tabling in the House the details of this agreement with his predecessor?

[English]

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should speak to his colleague from Port Moody—Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam who said, "We think Jean Chrétien did the right thing".

Members opposite cannot on one hand stand up in the House and say that Mr. Chrétien is somehow doing something wrong when on the other hand, one of their learned members is supportive and congratulates Mr. Chrétien for doing the right thing.

Beyond that, Mr. Chrétien, as an individual, does have a right to determine a course of action. He has done exactly that. It has nothing to do with the government.

Oral Questions

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first the Liberal government tried every trick in the book possible to block judge Gomery from doing his work. The government had the former prime minister sue Justice Gomery in order to shut him down. Now it has struck a secret deal with Mr. Chrétien regarding that lawsuit, the details of which it is refusing to elaborate upon.

Will the government amend the terms of reference in order to have Judge Gomery's report tabled in this House at the same time that it is presented to cabinet?

•(1435)

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if it were not such a serious matter, it would become amusing to see them bounce from pillar to post and from question period to question period desperately grasping at anything to shed some pall or to create some question about the work of Justice Gomery.

Justice Gomery said in his own words that according to section 13 of the Inquiries Act he is entitled to draw conclusions as to whether or not there has been misconduct and who may be responsible. Yet, the Conservatives have an opposition day motion that actually questions the logic of Justice Gomery. Their opposition day motion at best would be redundant, but if implemented would actually threaten the work of Justice Gomery.

* * *

[Translation]

PRIME MINISTER

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in this affair concerning his chief of staff, the Prime Minister's behaviour is a carbon copy of that of Jean Chrétien and Alfonso Gagliano in the sponsorship scandal. He thinks that denying something will make it disappear.

Will the Prime Minister finally understand that denying the responsibility of his chief of staff is not enough, that he has to take action, assume responsibility and suspend him, nothing less?

[English]

Hon. Tony Valeri (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, we are hearing allegations from the opposite side. The Prime Minister has said that he was informed that the member for Newton—North Delta approached his office about crossing the floor. He made it very clear that there would be no deals offered. There was no deal offered.

I do not understand why there is a continued line of questioning. This has been answered and if the hon. member does have information that is pertinent to this, I would suggest that he turn that over to the RCMP if he believes that there has been any wrongdoing.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's only defence in this affair concerning his chief of staff is to say that the member himself approached the government, which supposedly relieves his chief of staff of all responsibility.

Will the Prime Minister admit that buying someone is not made acceptable merely by the fact that someone offers himself for sale? That seems clear to me.

[English]

Hon. Tony Valeri (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again I repeat that there were no offers made. The hon. member has insinuated that there was an offer made. The Prime Minister has made it very clear that there would be no deals offered and there were no deals offered. In fact, it was the member for Newton—North Delta who approached the government about crossing the floor.

While the transcripts have been posted on someone's website at this point, we should see if these tapes are also going to be authenticated.

* * *

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, now that the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development has had the time to familiarize herself with the file on the creation of an independent employment insurance fund, she ought to be in a position to inform us of her intentions.

Having already come out in favour of an independent EI fund as a Conservative MP, can she tell us whether, as minister, she intends to maintain that position and take steps to create such a fund, as has been unanimously recommended by the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities?

[English]

Hon. Belinda Stronach (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and Minister responsible for Democratic Renewal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have had a chance to review the file. In budget 2005 there were considerable steps taken to bring about a system that brings about greater transparency, accountability and stability when setting that rate, and also independence. Above all, the Auditor General has said that those funds should remain consolidated with the public accounts.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, does the minister recall her reasons for voting in favour of an independent fund barely two months ago? If she does not, that is somewhat cause for concern for the department she heads.

Since a Bloc Québécois bill aimed at creating an independent EI fund is currently being studied in the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, does the minister not realize that now is when she needs to speak up and clearly support Bill C-280?

Oral Questions

•(1440)

[English]

Hon. Belinda Stronach (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and Minister responsible for Democratic Renewal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the hon. member that was before the budget. In the last budget the Government of Canada put in place new mechanisms to ensure greater transparency when studying EI premiums, independent advice, balancing revenues and costs and benefits paid out, and also a rate that will provide stability during times of economic fluctuations.

* * *

HEALTH

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, over a month ago the House unanimously agreed to compensate all tainted blood victims immediately. Since then the government has doled out over \$20 billion in new spending, yet it has not given one penny to tainted blood victims.

Why has the government not yet honoured the democratic wishes of Parliament and compensated all victims?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of State (Public Health), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as you know, there is an agreement. The Minister of Health has been very clear that we will enter into this agreement and we will try to get these people the money they need as soon as possible. As well, there is the judicial process and the justice who will guide us in these deliberations.

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it seems that the health minister is hiding in shame under his table this afternoon.

The government has admitted it bears responsibility for victims but still refuses to help them. It is apparent that the government will continue to ignore the will of Parliament and uses the actuarial audit as an excuse to delay making a decision.

Even if there is no surplus in the fund, will the minister still compensate all the victims?

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, order. I am sure the Minister of Health is very glad to have all this enthusiastic support and assistance in giving his answer to the question, but he wants to answer the question and we have to have some order so we can hear the answer.

The hon. Minister of Health has the floor.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Mr. Speaker, I am never one to hide anywhere nor to surreptitiously tape other people through a serial taper.

Let me say that on the issue of hep C, we have taken appropriate steps. The government negotiators are talking to the lawyers for the classes and we will reach an appropriate understanding so that these victims are compensated and the issue is satisfactorily dealt with.

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Jim Prentice (Calgary Centre-North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since last September the Deputy Prime Minister has repeatedly told this House that her residential school file is under control. Canadians knew that it was not, because a government that spends \$700 million settling 2% of the cases is not in control of much of anything.

Yesterday the Deputy Prime Minister abandoned course and announced a universal compensation plan that will cost in excess of \$4 billion. I do not see any money in the government's budget. I would like to know where it is going to get the money. Is it going to cut services or raise taxes? Where will the money come from?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately the hon. member misunderstands what we did yesterday with the national chief. What we did was put in place a federal representative, a distinguished jurist, former Supreme Court Justice Frank Iacobucci. He is going to be consulting and negotiating with the AFN, with the claimants and the claimants' lawyers, with the churches and lawyers for the churches. What we want to do here is find a timely expeditious way to deal with the claims of those who were so tragically affected by the Indian residential schools experience.

Mr. Jim Prentice (Calgary Centre-North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government has spent \$700 million not very expeditiously.

The Deputy Prime Minister has stood in this House for the past year defending her residential school program, telling us that her ADR system was working extraordinarily well. Yesterday she changed course and announced she needs another year and a justice to consult and study. Where was this admission of incompetence a year ago or five years ago?

•(1445)

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am not exactly sure why the hon. member thinks that we have abandoned ADR. In fact we, the AFN and others understand that ADR must continue to be an important part of our final resolution of individual claimants. ADR must be there, as the AFN recommended and others recommended, for those cases of aggravated physical assault and any form of sexual assault.

We have already made changes to streamline that ADR process. The federal representative may, in consultation with others, find other ways to streamline it, but I want to reassure everyone that we all understand the ADR process must—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Pontiac.

* * *

*[Translation]***THE ENVIRONMENT**

Mr. David Smith (Pontiac, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of the Environment.

Oral Questions

Over the weekend, the leader of the Bloc Québécois had the temerity to claim that the 2005 budget did not serve the interests of the people in Quebec. I know full well that the environment is very important to the people in my riding.

Could the minister tell the House how the environmental initiatives contained in the budget will benefit Quebec?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Quebecers are impatiently awaiting the greenest budget since Confederation. Very successful contacts have been established with the Government of Quebec for the use of the partnership fund.

Projects are sprouting up all over for the climate fund, for new investments, for national parks and for investment in renewable and wind energy. Mayors are waiting for green investments for cities and municipalities through the new deal, the green municipal fund, the EnerGuide program for cities and so on. Quebec must not be blocked, but greened even more.

* * *

[English]

CANADA-U.S. BORDER

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the American billionaire who owns the Ambassador bridge and literally has his hands on the throat of a third of the Canadian economy announced he wants Canadians to pay for him to relocate, set up and staff customs booths on U.S. soil to guarantee that he will control the next new crossing and the Canadian economy

The government has allowed private business interests to dictate the terms of Canada's most important border crossing in the U.S. where 42% of the nation's trade is crammed along two kilometres of waterfront.

Will the Prime Minister show some leadership and end this nonsense and support a new public border crossing in Windsor like we have everywhere else in this country? Will he commit to a public border crossing like we have everywhere else?

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member wants to be helpful, we have now a project before the committee on the Canada Transportation Act that will deal with international crossings and will help in the governance of international crossings.

I hope that the House supports this bill as soon as possible.

* * *

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Hon. Ed Broadbent (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the chair of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

At the committee's meeting this morning, Liberal, Bloc and NDP members cooperated in an attempt to get a resolution that would lead to electoral reform at long last in Canada. In contrast, the Conservative Party obstructed throughout the meeting. It filibustered. This led to the Liberals, the Bloc and the NDP leaving the meeting so there would be no quorum.

Will the chair of the committee reconvene another meeting of the committee in the hope that the Conservatives will come back and do the job that they were elected to do?

Hon. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have not answered questions in the House for a long time.

I would be more than pleased and honoured to convene a meeting of the committee as soon as possible to enable our committee, or at least I hope, to publish and produce a report for the House of Commons on this very important issue.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 2001 a naval safety officer warned his superiors, "It is my duty to warn you of the danger" and "my advice to everyone is to stop all work on peridite areas".

The Minister of National Defence has stood in this House of Commons and said that these subs would never go to sea unless they were fit to do so. However, in 2004 we all know of the tragedy that took place on board the HMCS *Chicoutimi*.

Would the minister explain how he approved the submarines to operate when they contain the toxic substance peridite?

• (1450)

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the whole point about what has been going on with our submarines has been a complete refitting and Canadianization of the submarines.

The hon. member knows we are working through this. The fleet does not go to sea unless it is safe. It is presently undergoing sea trials to make sure that all the matters that were looked at in the *Chicoutimi* inquiry have been thoroughly investigated.

The submarines will only be put to sea when they are fit and when they are safe and we know that. I know that they will be a great asset for the Canadian navy, the Canadian Forces and for our country.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it gets worse. The toxic substance was used as an adhesive to hold insulation in place. The insulation of choice in these submarines was asbestos. Perhaps this is why the Minister of National Defence felt it was necessary to wear a mask when he visited the *Chicoutimi* after the fire.

Would the minister explain to the crew members of our submarines who have been surrounded by and exposed to these toxic substances why he still insists that these boats were a great buy for Canada?

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, maybe the hon. member could explain his remarks to the members of our navy and the members of those submarines who are anxious to go back to sea. The submariner fleet that we have are trained, professional superb submariners. They want to get our boats back to sea.

Oral Questions

These will be very serviceable submarines in the Canadian navy. They have been refitted as a result of the *Chicoutimi* inquiry. They will be back to sea. They are an asset for us. Let us not denigrate them and the members of our navy. They are doing a damn good job of getting them back to sea.

* * *

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Peter Van Loan (York—Simcoe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government is continuing to penalize the regions. When tourism should be encouraged as a means of regional economic development and of keeping young people in the regions, this government is cutting subsidies.

Why is the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development cutting back on funding for summer jobs for students by nearly 50% in certain regions?

[English]

Hon. Belinda Stronach (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and Minister responsible for Democratic Renewal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there has been a rebalancing due to the number of constituencies, due to boundary changes and the 2001 census data.

To reduce the impact, I have asked the department to introduce safeguards to the regional budgets. In each budget no constituency will lose more than 30% of last year's constituency budget. That is an additional \$4 million added to the 2005-06 budget to soften the impact.

Mr. Peter Van Loan (York—Simcoe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am glad the minister at least acknowledges that there is a serious impact.

[Translation]

This government's lack of consideration for students can be seen in other sectors too.

Is the new Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development still willing to do what she still agreed with two weeks ago and does she plan to lower the excessive interest rates charged students, which are between 2.5% and 5% above prime?

[English]

Hon. Belinda Stronach (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and Minister responsible for Democratic Renewal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-48 does have specifics to make it easier for students to achieve loans. We look forward to the opposition supporting Bill C-48 so we can do some good things for students.

* * *

[Translation]

CHILD CARE

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Social Development keeps saying that there is no contradiction between his statements and the Prime Minister's. He says that negotiations with the Quebec government on child care are ongoing.

If the Minister of Social Development is claiming that he and the Prime Minister agree that Quebec should receive the funding for child care with no strings attached, why, seven months later, is there still no agreement with the Quebec government?

[English]

Hon. Ken Dryden (Minister of Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is no contradiction because there is no contradiction to what I have said. I have said repeatedly in the House that discussions are going on with the province of Quebec. They are going on currently. They are always done within the spirit and the understanding of all of those things that have been done already on early learning and child care in this country and always with the understanding that the province of Quebec will not be penalized for all of the good and ambitious work it has done.

* * *

[Translation]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of State for Infrastructure and Communities confirmed yesterday that his department wants to impose common national objectives before transferring gas tax revenues to Quebec and the provinces.

How does the minister justify his intention to impose objectives and conditions on Quebec, which, in this matter as in that of child care, is calling for the funds to be handed over unconditionally?

• (1455)

Hon. John Godfrey (Minister of State (Infrastructure and Communities), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we continue to work together with the utmost respect for the provinces in order to find common solutions. As part of the infrastructure programs, we have already held a consultation on objectives to meet environmental needs, for example. We are continuing to do this with Quebec and its municipalities.

* * *

[English]

CORRECTIONAL SERVICE OF CANADA

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness tried to assure us that convicted criminals do not have access to "any material that could be considered demeaning". Can the minister explain exactly how pornographic magazines are not demeaning to women?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I explained yesterday and I will reiterate again today, this is a difficult matter, but in fact those inmates can have in certain circumstances access to materials that are readily available to all other Canadians for purchase at newsstands in this country.

I am afraid that if the hon. member does not understand that I can only say that we in the Correctional Service of Canada work very hard within those constraints to ensure that inmates do not have demeaning materials or materials that could undermine—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Blackstrap.

Oral Questions

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am still trying to understand how prisoners, convicted rapists and first degree murderers got the right to vote.

Perhaps the minister could explain to women who have been raped and sexually assaulted by the one-third of the sex offenders who reoffend how she intends to ensure their protection when the government puts the rights of innocent victims of rape and sexual assault behind those of violent sex offenders.

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am afraid there is an underlying theme to this question that perhaps calls into question the official opposition's respect for the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, that in direct relation to the hon. member's question around who gets to vote and who does not get to vote in this country.

If members of the official opposition are suggesting that we should not respect the decisions of the Supreme Court of Canada, then I am afraid I have an awful lot of difficulty with—

The Speaker: The hon. member for London—Fanshawe.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Pat O'Brien (London—Fanshawe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the 2005 budget will provide much needed increased funding for the Canadian Forces and expand the number of troops in reserves.

Now that the budget has been approved in principle, will the Minister of National Defence tell the House when and how the Canadian Forces will begin to see the benefit of this important new funding?

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to acknowledge the tremendous support that the chair of the defence committee has given to our men and women in uniform. I would like to assure him that they are waiting anxiously to get the largest increase in the last 20 years, to allow them to recruit new forces, to purchase new equipment and to transform our military.

Let us join in this House in support of the young men and women in our military. Let us urge the members of the opposition to support our men and women in uniform and enable them to get the support they need to do the great job they are doing for Canada.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last year the Prime Minister indicated that he would meet with Chief Minister Misick of the Turks and Caicos Islands.

Canada's foreign affairs and international trade interests are best served through encouraging a stronger relationship among Canada, the Turks and Caicos Islands and indeed the entire Caribbean region. As an important step in this process, will the Prime Minister recommit to meeting with Chief Minister Misick in the very near future?

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada is not in a position to discuss at this time the kind of

formal association that the member seems to be referring to, but clearly we will continue to work on the continued development of trade and political ties.

Canada and the Caribbean have historical links that date back centuries. Our relationship with the Caribbean is one that is based on friendship and respect. We welcome every opportunity to strengthen these bonds with them.

• (1500)

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadian troops were staged from the Turks and Caicos and sent 100 miles to Haiti to help bring about security, but were removed last August.

Conditions in Haiti have deteriorated, with many killings by gangs armed with military weapons. United Nations troops are unable to contain the violence. With 100 Canadian civilian police officers in Haiti militarily unequipped and an election looming, what will Canada be doing security-wise to better help stop the killings to ensure a democratic and safe election?

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member is right to call to the attention of our country and the House the very difficult situation that we are encountering in Haiti at this time.

Clearly Haiti is in a transition. It is very important that we have lived that transition well. Indeed, security is a concern, but the Minustah, led by the Brazilians and the Chileans, with the Canadian police there as well, will continue to make the very best possible effort to improve the security, which will allow the healthy transition into a democracy with the next election in Haiti.

* * *

[Translation]

FURNITURE INDUSTRY

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, after cutting 80 jobs in February, Shermag announced yesterday that it is permanently closing its furniture manufacturing plant in Victoriaville, resulting in the definitive loss of 95 more jobs, another harsh blow to the region.

Does the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development realize that concrete measures are needed and that it is urgent to reinstate a permanent assistance program for older workers directly hit by these increasingly frequent plant closures?

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, up until 1995, Canada Economic Development contributed substantially to the development of Shermag. However, as you know, the company is now over 2,000 employees strong and the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec does not target this type of company. We regret the job losses. We hope Shermag will be able to develop again in the future.

Privilege

[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the human rights conflict in Colombia is critical. The internal armed conflict claims the lives of approximately 11 people each day and has created the third highest internally displaced population in the world after Sudan and Angola.

The security situation has improved under President Uribe's democratic security program. However, violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, both by the insurgent groups and by the security forces, continue. Civilians, particularly human rights defenders, trade unionists and civil society organizations, are most affected. What action is the Canadian government taking to improve the human rights situation in Colombia?

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, of course we share the concerns of the hon. member about the serious human rights situation in Colombia. Our embassy staff in Bogota travels to the conflict areas of Colombia to provide strong and visible support to vulnerable groups and individuals and continually urges the Colombian government, directly and through the United Nations and other organizations, to respect its international human rights obligations. Canada currently chairs a group of 24 donor countries that are working with the Colombian government, United Nations agencies and civil society organizations to promote human rights across the country.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of His Excellency Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: I would also like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the Honourable Greg Sorbara, Minister of Finance for the Province of Ontario.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

* * *

● (1505)

PRIVILEGE

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege. During question period the hon. member for Ottawa Centre made reference to events that took place earlier today in the procedure and House affairs committee meeting that was being held in camera. In fact, I have the notice of today's committee meeting no. 37, which states, "Orders of the day: In camera discussion of electoral reform".

His presentation of the facts is extremely selective. He knows full well that having raised it publicly, I am in no position to respond to his statements other than to make the point that they vary considerably from an objective review of the facts of what actually

happened and certainly in spirit are basically opposite to what actually went on, in my opinion.

He did this in a way that I believe violates the privilege of the entire committee by revealing in camera proceedings and, in particular, those members from the Conservative Party whose actions are being presented in a negative light and in a way that precludes their responding without making a similar offence to the Standing Orders.

I am well aware, as you no doubt are, Mr. Speaker, that Speakers have consistently ruled that except in the most extreme situations they will only hear questions of privilege arising from committee proceedings upon presentation of a report from the committee which directly deals with the matter and not as a question of privilege raised by an individual member.

However I believe this is an extraordinary situation. I draw your attention to pages 128 and 129 of Marleau and Montpetit where it states:

Committees have reported to the House on the refusal of witnesses to appear when summoned; the refusal of witnesses to answer questions; the refusal of witnesses to provide papers or records; the refusal of individuals to obey orders of a committee; and the divulging of events during an *in camera* meeting.

I would think the divulging of events in a selective manner that is not fully in accord with the actual events of what took place in the committee would seem to me to be a matter that requires the personal attention of the Speaker.

When you are finished with this question of privilege, Mr. Speaker, I wish to ask for unanimous consent for the tabling of the motion that was under discussion in the House so that all members can examine it and see that in fact the hon. member from Ottawa Centre was presenting the facts highly selectively.

● (1510)

Hon. Ed Broadbent (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, with respect to the committee meeting that took place today in camera, what I had to say about it was factually accurate and obviously hoped it was totally consistent with the rules of the House. I did not name any particular member, nor did I cite any particular words. I described what went on. If the member wants to challenge that I welcome him to do so.

Hopefully, what will come from this is a committee in which all members will finally do some work.

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, clearly what we have here is an admission of guilt. The member for Ottawa Centre has clearly indicated and confirmed the facts as presented by my colleague in the sense that he knowingly and willingly broke the confidence of that committee because that meeting took place in camera. Then he raised it here in question period which is totally inappropriate.

As my colleague says, Mr. Speaker, I hope you will rule in his favour on this question of privilege.

Privilege

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I do not know how the hon. House leader of the official opposition could suggest that the member for Ottawa Centre has made any admission of guilt. I think he was quite clear in pointing out that what he raised in the House today had to do with the procedure and mechanics of the committee working. He did not divulge information in terms of the substance of the motion or naming members or divulging debate.

He basically focused on the process and workings of that committee and the fact that the Conservative Party chose to operate in a way that made the committee completely inoperable and resulted in the action taken by the hon. member. In no way has this violated any ethics or privileges in the House and I hope the Speaker would agree with that.

The Speaker: Obviously the whole question has caught the Speaker by surprise. I had no idea that the meeting of the committee in question, which was the subject of the question today, was an in camera session.

In any event, the question itself dealt with future meetings of the committee which is what made the question one that was acceptable during question period.

I will look into the matter further and review the remarks made by the hon. member for Ottawa Centre in the preamble to the question which I presume are the items objected to by the hon. member for Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington and of course supported by the arguments made by the hon. member for Prince George—Peace River.

I will then have regard to the arguments put forward by the hon. member for Vancouver East and the hon. member for Ottawa Centre in respect of this and get back to the House in due course.

Is the hon. member for Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington rising on another question of privilege out of the same question?

Mr. Scott Reid: No, Mr. Speaker, I am rising on a matter that is related.

I am not revealing anything that was done in camera when I say this, but the committee was reviewing its 40th report to the House of Commons which contained a series of motions put forward by the leader of the New Democratic Party. One specific item with regard to scheduling, which I regarded as impractical, was the subject of discussion.

I will be seeking the unanimous consent of the House to present this draft report and table it here. It then will become evident that what is going on here is in fact very different from the presentation of the facts given by the member for Ottawa Centre.

For this reason, I am asking for unanimous consent to table this draft report in the House.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent for the tabling of the report?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: The Chair has notice of a question of privilege from the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell.

BLOCKING OF MEMBERS' TELEPHONE LINES

Hon. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege involving a matter where individuals or groups have been blocking telephone lines of hon. members of this House in a way that I believe prevents them from doing their work.

Erskine May defines parliamentary privilege as:

—the sum of the peculiar rights enjoyed by each House collectively [as a constituent part of the High Court of Parliament] and by members of each House individually without which they could not discharge their functions; and which exceed those possessed by other bodies or individuals.

It is about this reference in Erskine May's 20th edition that I wish to address the House.

Second, Mr. Speaker, one of your predecessors, the late Speaker Madam Jeanne Sauvé, on October 29, 1980, ruled that "...while our privileges are defined, contempt of the House has no limits". She said, "When new ways are found to interfere with our proceedings, so too will the House, in appropriate cases, be able to find that a contempt of the House has occurred".

Mr. Speaker, I also want to remind the House that the matter of blocking telephone lines has been ruled on by yourself, in the previous Parliament, albeit for a different reason, in the case of the then member of Parliament, Mr. Jim Pankiw, who, through actions of his own, was blocking telephone or electronic communications of other offices. The Speaker ruled at that time that was inappropriate behaviour and I do believe that rather drastic actions were taken, such as either the removal of the computer or the lines accessing it to the system.

Over the last 29 hours, my office has received no fewer than 828 faxes here on Parliament Hill. I have them here. I am willing to table them for the consideration of the Speaker if Mr. Speaker feels that this will help guide him in determining whether or not this is an abuse of what should legitimately be going on.

I want to inform the Speaker as well that we had to unplug our equipment for a number of hours because it was working all the time.

I want to inform the House as well that members of Parliament in doing their work have access to, and it is normal and it is in the public domain, telephone services. The fax machine is plugged into one of these telephone lines and is therefore an accessory to a telephone. The telephone numbers are communicated to our constituents who are able to reach us either by telephoning or sending us an electronic message by way of a fax. This equipment is no longer available and has not been for a number of members of this House for the last day and a half. I understand that other members will ask to intervene with your honour later.

Privilege

In the case of my office, whereby we normally receive 40 to 50 faxes from constituents in a day, we have been able to receive a grand total of five over the last two days. The rest of the time the equipment is completely blocked. A group calling itself Focus on the Family, which has the website www.marriagematters.ca, is making it such that our telephone systems have been rendered inoperative this way.

I also want to bring to the attention of the House of Commons that a similar case in the province of Ontario was brought to the attention of the courts. An individual by the name of William Murdoch had plugged up the fax machine of a provincial member of the Ontario legislature. He was convicted in the Ontario Superior Court of Justice under article 430(1)(c) of the Criminal Code which makes it an offence to utilize a telephone line to harass anyone.

Mr. Speaker will be familiar with the fact that there was a criminal conviction for doing precisely the same thing in another place to another member of Parliament, albeit in that a case a provincial member of Parliament.

• (1515)

I notice that some members over there feel that my constituents' not being able to reach me is not in their view an issue of privilege and it is one which they choose to heckle as opposed to treating it seriously.

Marleau and Montpetit says on page 84:

Speakers have consistently upheld the right of the House to the services of its Members free from intimidation, obstruction and interference.

That obstruction, intimidation and interference manifests itself when 1,000 pieces of electronic data are sent to my office in a way that prevents every constituent of Glengarry—Prescott—Russell from reaching me. Furthermore, the notices sent by officers of the House to members to appear in committee and otherwise are often sent by fax as well. That is not accessible either.

I submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that this is a bona fide case for privilege, that the organization in question, in my view, is guilty of contempt of Parliament. If the Speaker so rules, I would be prepared to move the appropriate motion to refer this to the parliamentary committee, which I have the honour and privilege to chair.

• (1520)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Marceau (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the problem pointed out by the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell is a concern to me at the present time.

I have received more than 1,000 faxes in 36 hours. When this is done, people from the riding of Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, who often communicate with my office in Ottawa by fax, are prevented from doing so by a group that is monopolizing an essential tool for all members of this House. Being able to contact one's member is a basic right in our democratic society.

We have also received more than 2,300 e-mails since Monday morning. This uses the resources of House servers, as you know, and once again impedes the legitimate communications of my office because of the delays caused by heavy e-mail traffic.

In addition, the time needed just to sort through all this monopolizes my employees' time. When this is done, not only are electronic communications blocked, to the detriment of people in Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles who want to contact their member, but my employees have greater difficulty providing the people of Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles with the services to which they are entitled and which they expect from their representative in the federal Parliament.

I will be brief because the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell has already done a good job pointing this out. It is therefore an infringement on the privileges of members of Parliament because they cannot do their work properly or remain in contact with the citizens in their ridings. In addition, thousands of Quebeckers and Canadians could not contact their federal member.

That having been said, something concrete must be done to put a stop to this kind of activity.

I see my friend from Calgary Southwest getting ready to speak. I think that he will probably defend what is being done. It might be of interest to him, though, that it could be his office that is blocked and he could be unable to do his work. That could very easily happen to him next week or maybe even tomorrow.

I ask that action be taken to ensure that these kinds of activities, these attacks on the privileges of members of Parliament, are stopped.

[*English*]

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I understand the concern raised by my two hon. friends, but I believe that this is, in the eight years I have been here, one of the more specious efforts to find a prima facie question of privilege.

What the two members have raised is quite simply the fact that several hundred Canadian citizens who pay taxes to support this place have used public telecommunication lines, supported by Parliament, to contact members of Parliament, which is their every right and privilege.

It is our duty, Sir, to receive those communications in the discharge of our public office. We cannot, until we receive a message, discern whether or not that message comes from a constituent. Indeed, I would submit, and I am sure both of my colleagues would agree with me, that the duties of a member of Parliament extend beyond simply communicating with our constituents.

I do not know but perhaps some of the several hundred messages received by the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell came from his constituents. However, I find it difficult to understand when the member says that it is now effectively impossible for constituents to send him faxes because other people are. If he is receiving faxes, it is because it is possible to reach him.

From time to time, we all receive large numbers of communications, whether telephonic, computerized or through telephonic facsimile, and sometimes it is difficult for our staff to process them in a short period of time. However, we are here to listen to Canadians.

Privilege

For my friend in the Bloc Québécois to suggest that this is an attack, the simple fact of citizens wishing to communicate with members of Parliament on an issue of public moment constitutes an attack on anyone, really is absurd.

It is equally absurd for the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell to characterize conveying public views on an important public matter before Parliament as “harassment”. It is simply free, political speech with elected representatives of the Parliament of Canada.

I think, Sir, for you even to consider receiving this as a question of privilege would be to throw into question that free expression to elected members of Parliament.

If there is a logistical need for additional means to contact us so that lines are not clogged, then perhaps the House administration should explore those logistical issues. However, the solution to receiving too much input from Canadians is not to find that democratic expression of opinion constitutes harassment, or an attack or a violation of the privileges of members of the House. If a logistical solution needs to be made in terms of additional or overflow fax lines or email accounts, I am sure that solution can be found.

However, let us not begin censoring Canadians from contacting their members of Parliament and mischaracterizing free political expression as harassment. That, Sir, is specious.

• (1525)

Hon. Don Boudria: Mr. Speaker, I understand that another member has an issue related to this, so I will be brief. One of the faxes I have received is from someone impersonating a member of the House. I have received several copies of those as well.

I consider this to be very serious as well. It is all part of these 828 faxes that I have received, some of them from people impersonating members of the House. If members do not think that is serious, I ask them to review it again.

Finally, I remind the House that an almost identical case in the province of Ontario was judged to be a criminal offence. A conviction was rendered. On appeal, the appellant lost and the conviction stood.

In that case, harassing a provincial member of parliament by blocking the member's fax system deliberately to prevent anyone else from communicating with him or her is a criminal offence. If it is a criminal offence to do so, it at least offends my privileges as a member of Parliament because my constituents cannot reach me.

That is clear in my mind. It was clear in the judge's mind. It was clear in the appellate court's mind that this was the case at another level. For members today to pretend that this is not serious, that it is somehow legitimate to plug up the communication system of a member of the House, I say the day will come when someone will interfere with their communications.

Just as was the case many hundreds of years ago, people attempted to interfere with the access and egress of members to the parliament of the United Kingdom from where came the decisions of one of your predecessors, Mr. Speaker: freedom of molestation. Freedom of molestation was the freedom of access to that place. In

modern terms it is the access for our constituents to be able to reach us. It is same thing by extension.

I bring it to the attention of the House, hoping for a favourable ruling.

• (1530)

Mr. Jim Gouk (British Columbia Southern Interior, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to be very clear on this. I want to give due consideration to the hon. member if he has a legitimate complaint. In his last presentation he said that the people who were faxing him were doing it deliberately to block his ability to communicate.

I heard my colleague talk about something totally different. He talked about the right of people to communicate with elected representatives across the country. If I were trying to jam the hon. member's fax machine, I would do it with one continuous feed of nonsense stuff anonymously sent so that it would not stop because if it did, then someone else could send something.

Maybe he could clarify this. Is this a single continuous stream of nonsense or are they legitimate letters signed by individuals asking for something that is the appropriate business of the House?

Hon. Don Boudria: Mr. Speaker, the letters are all identical. They are all generated from the same place in a systematic way. Some of them have been produced by way of someone clicking on a machine dozens and dozens of times. In other words in some cases there are dozens of identical letters coming out in sequence on the fax machine. No one legitimately contacts a member of Parliament by transmitting an identical message produced by someone else by way of a computer generated system in Vancouver to someone in Sarsfield, Ontario, which is where I live, or a member of Parliament from the other end of the country or anyone else.

That is not the way in which to communicate with a member of Parliament. We all have a right to communicate with each other. On the other hand, there is a point where the harassment threshold arrives. We all know that. If I phone my neighbour once, that is legitimate. If I were to phone him 35 times in half an hour, the police would be at my door because that would not be legitimate, and we all know that is what it is.

I have the documents, which I am willing to table, examples of dozens and dozens of the same letter being generated within minutes from the same sender, the same donor, if that is what they call themselves, of this information in sequence. None of these letters are signed. They are all computer generated and the computer generated names at the bottom some of them purport to be hon. members of the House.

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, not an hour ago we heard the Deputy Prime Minister stand and tell the House that it was the Conservative Party that was not respecting the Charter of Rights. Now we listen to an hon. member talk about not wanting to receive faxes.

From my perspective, I have had emails flood into my office on this similar issue, 1,500 to 2,000 a day, for which I have had to bring in additional staff so the rights of Canadians can be heard. I think the hon. member has failed to prove to the House that any of his constituents' rights were denied.

Supply

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is more a question for clarification. The hon. member referred to a provincial MLA that took the matter up with the police. The person was subsequently charged and the criminal justice system dealt with the matter. If I am understanding the hon. member, he is saying that he has a similar problem as the person in the provincial system. I am curious whether the member taken the matter up with the police.

Hon. Don Boudria: Mr. Speaker, I do not think one has to be around this place for as long as I have to know that the privileges of members of Parliament are not protected by way of the provincial courts or even in this case the superior courts.

What I was indicating by way of analogy is that this is an offence to do so in the systematic way that it is done. If it is an offence against the Criminal Code, whether I attempt to lay an information or not—or whether other members do, as I am not the only one; there are probably a dozen of us who have been similarly affected—was raised by way of indicating the seriousness of what is here. What I do as a private citizen otherwise I will deal with myself.

The issue is still that one, our Speaker ruled in the past that tampering with telephone service was deemed to be unacceptable. Two, in a similar way at the provincial level this kind of activity has been judged to be a criminal offence. Three, no one can convince me that the same person sending dozens and dozens of computer generated faxes one after the other is in any way representation before an MP. This is harassment of members of Parliament who sit on a committee of the House to do a job assigned by the House of Commons.

I hope I am not being repetitive, Mr. Speaker. I am responding pursuant to your instructions to something that was raised by a member on the other side of the House.

• (1535)

The Speaker: The Chair will take the matter under advisement.

[*Translation*]

I would like to thank the hon. members for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell and Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, as well as the other members who raised questions about this issue. I would like to thank the hon. member for Calgary Southeast for his comments and contribution.

[*English*]

I will take the matter under advisement and get back to the House in due course and render a ruling on this matter which I hope will satisfy the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell and all the other hon. members who made submissions.

Perhaps the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell rather than table the documentation could make it available to the Chair so I could have a look at it in the course of deliberations on this matter.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—GOMERY COMMISSION

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: Before the time provided for members' statements and oral question period, the hon. member for Drummond had the floor. She still has five minutes to answer questions or take comments on her remarks.

Since no members wish to speak, we will continue with the hon. member for Repentigny.

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to the motion of my colleagues and friends in the Conservative party. It is their first official opposition day. Until very recently, the government was usurping these days in May so that it would not have to debate any motion it did not like. Even though the Prime Minister conducted his leadership campaign on the democratic deficit, the government decided to eliminate certain opposition days, including those of the Conservatives, the NDP and the Bloc Québécois.

Since I am speaking after oral question period, I think that it is important to recall the purpose of the Conservative party motion for people who are listening to us or watching. I will then be pleased to explain the Bloc Québécois position on this motion.

The Conservative party's motion reads as follows—for once it is relatively short and simple:

That this House call on the Government to amend section (k) of the Gomery Commission's terms of reference to allow the Commissioner to name names and assign responsibility.

That could mean: find the guilty party and lay charges. This reminds me of the time when George W. Bush was looking for Saddam Hussein in Iraq, dead or alive. That is kind of how we understand this motion, which asks the government to expand the Gomery commission's terms of reference to identify the guilty parties, subpoena them, name them, punish them, and so forth.

In populist terms and in barroom discussions, this motion would certainly be looked upon favourably by the public. Everybody, of course, wants to identify the guilty, subpoena them, and impose the punishments and sentences they deserve for the offences they have committed.

But here in this House—and this is the role of members of Parliament—we should go beyond our initial instinctive reactions. Those would lead us to condemn these people and turn the Gomery commission into a TV-style people's court, or something like *Star Académie* or *Canadian Idol*, which are on these days. All Canadians would get a look at the guilty parties.

The Bloc Québécois does not support this Conservative Party motion. It is extremely important, nonetheless, to remember that we do want those responsible for the sponsorship scandal to be identified and punished for their crimes. However, the problem, for us, is changing the terms of reference of a commission or a judge, after witnesses have already been heard.

The Gomery commission was established under the Inquiries Act, which states:

The Governor in Council may, whenever the Governor in Council deems it expedient, cause inquiry to be made into and concerning any matter connected with the good government of Canada or the conduct of any part of the public business thereof.

So, if Parliament wants to amend the terms of reference of the Gomery Commission in order for the commissioner to name names or assign responsibility, the Inquiries Act of 1985 must be amended.

One notion the Bloc Québécois continues to hold very dear is rigour. So, when a motion by the official opposition asks the judge to go one step further and identify the guilty parties, we find that this demonstrates a lack of rigour. The Inquiries Act of 1985 would have to be amended first.

The Gomery commission is a commission of inquiry, which means that it can make recommendations only; it does not have any real judicial powers. Section (k) of the Gomery commission's terms of reference, issued by the committee of the Privy Council under Part I of the Inquiries Act, stipulates that:

• (1540)

the Commissioner be directed to perform his duties without expressing any conclusion or recommendation regarding the civil or criminal liability of any person or organization and to ensure that the conduct of the inquiry does not jeopardize any ongoing criminal investigation or criminal proceedings;

That is what is important. Opposition to the Conservative motion does not mean that we are on side with the Liberals and want to protect the criminals involved in the Gomery commission. What it does mean is that, in the terms of reference of the inquiry—which the Conservatives ought to have read first—it is specified and emphasized that Justice Gomery was given his terms of reference under the Inquiries Act and cannot do anything that would jeopardize any other criminal investigation or proceedings that might be under way.

Since this incredible Gomery commission business began, we have had several warnings about respecting the inquiry and the legal system under which we operate.

I would remind you of some facts that demonstrate the importance of being extremely cautious if we want, once and for all, to respect the wishes of Canadians—and in particular of Quebecers—in order to identify those responsible for the sponsorship scandal and to let the Gomery commission do its work.

The first example concerns parliamentary privilege. When Chuck Guité and Alfonso Gagliano appeared before the Public Accounts Committee, they were given a guarantee that their testimony could not be used elsewhere. They benefited from parliamentary immunity in committee, which allowed them to talk about what had happened without their testimony being able to be used subsequently in a case against them.

In the Gomery commission some of the lawyers wanted to change the rule of parliamentary privilege. Most fortunately, it was retained so that witnesses and MPs who speak out in committee will not have their testimony used against them.

Since they wanted to charge Chuck Guité and Alfonso Gagliano, they could have said they were going to waive parliamentary

Supply

immunity. This would have created a dangerous precedent for the House of Commons, for parliamentarians and possibly for witnesses. Regardless of their party, all parliamentarians were steadfast in taking whatever steps were necessary to preserve this parliamentary privilege.

A little later on in the Gomery inquiry, a publication ban was imposed on the testimony of Chuck Guité, Jean Brault and one other person. I have forgotten the name but I am sure someone is about to prompt me with it.

Why was this publication ban imposed when Chuck Guité and Jean Brault appeared? Because, at the time, or a few weeks later, their criminal trials were to begin.

They could have said no to the publication ban by claiming that the public wanted to know and to listen. Since it was a “people’s court”, they could have gone in and ignored all the rules of prudence within the legal system. However, such was not the case. The terms of reference for the Gomery inquiry specify that the inquiry must not jeopardize any ongoing criminal investigation or criminal proceedings. Justice Gomery was being prudent in maintaining a partial publication ban, which he lifted shortly afterward. Next, a request was made to postpone the criminal proceedings. So far, Chuck Guité, Paul Coffin and Jean Brault are already charged with fraud.

I will go even further. In the scandal, there were proceedings to the tune of \$40 million involving 10 groups or individuals implicated in the sponsorship scandal.

Yes, we want to find the guilty parties. Yes, we must identify them. Yes, the guilty parties must be punished. Yes, we must finally show the public who took part in this scandal.

• (1545)

However, we must not do this the way the Conservatives want to, in other words, by changing the terms of reference of Justice Gomery after the fact and by using the testimony of those who have already appeared before the Gomery inquiry for purposes other than intended.

That is why the Bloc Québécois wants the guilty parties to be identified and punished, but not this way.

Mr. Peter MacKay (Central Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague on his speech.

I have a very simple question for him. Does my colleague believe that the RCMP has the authority to arrest or investigate the government and the Liberal Party, even though the Auditor General's report clearly stated that the RCMP received money through the sponsorship program? It is a serious problem for a criminal or civil investigation when the RCMP, the national police force, appears to have a conflict of interest.

I would like the hon. member to comment on this.

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague very much for his question and his kind words about my speech.

I share his concerns about the RCMP. In another vein—and I will elaborate on this—just because we have some doubts about the RCMP's integrity in investigating this, we should not, in order to calm those doubts, distort the Gomery commission's mandate.

Supply

If the RCMP is not the most suitable institution to investigate the sponsorship scandal, perhaps the attorney general should initiate proceedings through the Canadian legal system, as he did in the case of Chuck Guité, Paul Coffin and Jean Brault. They are accused of fraud in the Canadian legal system. They are therefore before the courts now. If I am not mistaken, Paul Coffin pleaded guilty this morning to 15 charges. The RCMP was not involved in this matter. When the attorney general launched a \$40 million suit against Groupaction, Everest, Gosselin Communications, Lafleur and their presidents, he did not involve the RCMP either.

If the Gomery commission enables us to identify other people responsible for the sponsorship scandal, it will be up to the legal system to prove that they are really guilty of fraud and to sanction them, if necessary.

However, as regards the RCMP's involvement in the sponsorship scandal, the RCMP has already initiated a dozen investigations of the government, for example, there was Shawinigate and Placeteco; we could provide a list.

My colleague from Central Nova will remember, through his experience in the House, that we are still awaiting, in an odd sort of way, a number of RCMP reports. Here in this House, regardless of political party, we can all ask why in some cases it takes 2, 3, 5 or 8 years to get an answer following an RCMP investigation. In this regard, I share his question and his concern about the speed with which the RCMP makes public its investigations of the government.

• (1550)

[English]

Mr. Peter MacKay (Central Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to indicate at the outset that I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Brandon—Souris, home of the Wheat Kings.

The motion itself is a very straightforward motion calling for the expanding of the mandate of Mr. Justice Gomery to allow the reference to give the commissioner the capacity to name names and to assign responsibility. It is a very straightforward attempt to give Canadians the answers they are looking for.

The commission has been sitting for some time. I would suggest that giving the commissioner the ability to, upon the conclusion of the evidence, now weigh the facts and make determinations as to responsibility is what most Canadians are expecting.

It is a major deception that has taken place through the political machinations that the Prime Minister perpetrated on the country. Members of his cabinet have tried to deliberately distract away from the real issue, which is one of accountability, one of a deliberate Liberal Party conspiracy and an effort made to deliberately divert public money through Liberal friendly ad firms into the Liberal Party coffers for the purposes of perpetrating and preserving power. We saw in recent days those desperate attempts.

All of this bears further witness to the fact that the Prime Minister will stop at nothing to hold onto power. I also would suggest, as my colleague has alluded to, that there are so many other scandals. This is the most scandal ridden government in Canadian history. History will bear that out and show it to be true.

We know that the real fear of the Prime Minister is that upon a change in power the incoming government will shine the light in all the corners. It will look at the various other programs that have gone awry. Need I mention the gun registry, the HRDC scandal and the helicopter cancellation? The list goes on and on. Massive amounts of public money were diverted, wasted and in some cases stolen. In many cases, that money wound up back in the coffers of the Liberal Party through a very deliberate and well thought out plan on its part.

Now, who was responsible remains the crux of the matter. Why would we not want to shed more light on that critical issue? Why would we not want a complete and transparent finding of fact? Why would we not want to give Justice Gomery the ability to do just that? The reference in clause k for Justice Gomery states that:

—the Commissioner be directed to perform his duties without expressing any conclusion or recommendation regarding the civil or criminal liability of any person or organization and to ensure that the conduct of the inquiry does not jeopardize any ongoing criminal investigations or criminal proceedings;...

No one wants that. We are not asking for that threshold of criminal or civil responsibility to be met, but simply that the assigning of responsibility be made by the commissioner after his having heard a great deal of evidence.

Justice Gomery himself, on the terms of reference from which he is working, stated that:

Accordingly, the Commission may not establish either criminal culpability or civil responsibility for sums of money lost or misspent, or damages; it does not have the capacity nor does it intend to do so.

He went on to say:

Its future findings of fact and statements of opinion will be unconnected to normal legal criteria, and will be intended to serve as the basis for the recommendations which I will be making as required by paragraph (b) of the terms of reference. It follows that there will be no legal consequences arising from the Commission's findings and Reports, and they will not be enforceable in, and will not bind either civil or criminal courts which might consider the same subject matters.

What we are talking about here is simply allowing the commissioner to make findings of responsibility, not to interfere, not to cast a pall, not to in any way diminish or distract away from the criminal investigations that may or may not be going on. We know there have been criminal charges laid so there are some criminal investigations that have proceeded. Are there others? The Prime Minister refused to answer that question today.

We are not looking to somehow empower Mr. Justice Gomery himself to lay charges, as was alluded to by some. To assign civil or criminal responsibility is a different standard. We are looking to simply allow for the naming of those individuals, which would be clearly based on his findings.

No one has ever denied that this was going on. The Prime Minister, in his well publicized mercy plea to the nation, never denied that this happened or that it was the Liberal Party doing it. It is not a Quebec scandal. It is not any other party's scandal or any other government's scandal. It was a Liberal Party scandal that went on for upwards of 10 years in a very deliberate way.

Supply

• (1555)

With his usual bombast and professorial, condescending way, the Minister of Justice cites selectively from statutes and case law. The reality is that section 13 does not contemplate an inquiry such as the Gomery commission making findings against persons, but that section requires notice. There is a requirement that notice take place. No notice has been given to any witnesses who have testified or who are yet to testify.

In fact, we have heard testimony under oath that was at first subject to publication bans and which did involve persons who were criminally charged, including one who has now pled guilty. There was in fact no attempt whatsoever to jeopardize those ongoing investigations, no prejudice, and no similar conclusions would be reached on civil or criminal matters.

From the commissioner's findings, we are simply asking that the commissioner, after having had a very fulsome examination of sworn testimony, witnesses and documents, essentially be allowed to name names. What could be more straightforward than that? What could be more in keeping with the Prime Minister's now laughable claims that he wanted to get to the bottom of the sponsorship scandal, that he wanted to leave no stone unturned, and that he wanted the Gomery commission to have a complete range of access to all of this? That is washed away by the government's opposition to this attempt to expand the inquiry mandate.

The burden of proof of examining the facts is different. This is not making a substantive finding; it is making recommendations.

There is another point to be made on the recommendations. The Prime Minister has empowered someone to implement the recommendations of Gomery, but the recommendations of Gomery will be washed away by an election that is going to come 30 days after those recommendations are made, so that of course again is another massive smoke and mirrors deception on the part of the Prime Minister.

The sponsorship scandal clearly is proving to be the worst scandal in our country's history. We have heard sworn testimony that the Liberal Party received kickback cash for sponsorship contracts. These are not allegations or innuendoes. This is sworn testimony under oath and is subject to perjury charges if it is clearly stated that somehow it was untrue and deliberate. It is testimony that in some cases is tantamount to confessions of fraud, false pretenses and a litany of other breaches of the Elections Canada Act. There was malice aforethought, as they say. It was deliberate. It was intentional. This program was but one program in one department.

The deeds and the direction of the Liberal Party were pure deception from start to finish. The Prime Minister knew, or ought to have known, as the chief financial officer of the country, that this was taking place under his very nose. It is not believable and there is no veracity in saying he did not know; that is impossible. Incompetent or involved are the only conclusions that Canadians should come to about him unless he was in some sort of trance.

This money being used for partisan purposes was used in at least three elections. Again, it was used to buy support, essentially, to buy party workers and to buy a partisan attempt to win elections, which they did and which furthers the fraud, a massive fraud on the public

trust and a massive fraud on the public trust, unprecedented in our country's history.

The Auditor General identified \$250 million in program expenditures with \$100 million going directly to Liberal-friendly ad agencies in commissions, but the Kroll Lindquist Avey audit, an independent audit, shows that there was actually a total of \$355 million, with almost half, 44%, going to those agencies as commissions. The amount that has made its way into the Liberal Party of Canada remains unknown. We do know for certain that the \$750,000, and again there is this ruse that somehow a trust fund has been set up, would not cover the half of it.

Multiple witnesses claim that they were engaged in this deliberate attempt to funnel part of their royalties from the sponsorship program back to the Liberal Party as a means of ensuring future contracts, about as sordid a political scandal as it gets and a classic fraud: public money for partisan support.

Testimony from the commission shows that many Liberal firms got rich. Many Liberal firms and individuals profited exorbitantly. Claude Boulay and his partner, Diane Deslauriers, from Groupe Everest, earned a combined total of \$29.8 million in salaries and dividends. We heard Diane Deslauriers testify that she worked almost every day in the Prime Minister's campaign office in the 1993 election and we know Mr. Boulay worked on the Prime Minister's first leadership bid.

• (1600)

The Prime Minister in his testimony before Gomery barely admitted knowing these people. In fact he was not sure that they were merely more than passing acquaintances. We saw correspondence that put that very much to the lie. It is not believable. His credibility has been shredded daily by examination of facts.

Jean Lafleur and his family earned \$14.1 billion. Luc Lemay, owner of Groupe Polygone, earned \$13.5 billion. This is a beauty; Jacques Corriveau, a close confidant of former prime minister Jean Chrétien, earned \$8 million mostly in fees from sponsorship subcontracts. He also admitted at the commission that he put Liberal Party staffers on his company's payroll while they worked for the party. Jean Brault and his wife earned another \$4.9 million from the sponsorship program. Jean Brault paid a number of Liberal Party workers through Groupaction. The Kroll audit found that \$1.7 million of the transactions on the books of Groupaction went back to Jean Brault's claim that he effectively laundered money to the Liberal Party.

What was the common denominator in all of those cases? They were Liberals. They were giving money back to the Liberal Party that had come to them through ill-gotten gains. It was public money.

It is a sad day when we have to continually take the time of the House to state the obvious. That party is not fit to govern. That party has breached the public trust in a massive way. Justice Gomery should be given all the tools, all the ability, to expose all the corruption. That is what today's motion is about.

Supply

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this inquiry was launched under the Inquiries Act. Section 13 gives the commissioner very broad powers. He gave an opening statement when he started last September indicating that he had the power to find misconduct and ascribe responsibility. That is very clear. However he cannot find a party guilty of a criminal proceeding or ascribe civil responsibility. To quote the words of the member for Calgary—Nose Hill, “clause (k) prohibits Gomery naming anyone as a guilty party”.

The member for Central Nova should know that we deal with a well-developed system of justice. When a person is charged with a criminal offence it is usually done by an indictment or summary conviction. There is disclosure. The accused person has the right to retain and instruct counsel. There is a very extensive well-known procedure on evidential rules. A trial is held, and if the prosecutorial arm of government is able to prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt, the person is found guilty and sanctions are imposed.

If I follow the logic of the motion, all of that is thrown out the door. According to the words of the member for Calgary—Nose Hill, Mr. Gomery can find the guilty party and I guess the sentencing would be left to another judge.

I have two questions for the member. All of this is codified in our Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Do you agree with me as I think most other lawyers—

• (1605)

The Deputy Speaker: May I ask the member for Charlottetown to please address the member by his riding name.

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Would you agree with me, through you Mr. Speaker, that—

The Deputy Speaker: Excuse me. I hate to interrupt the member again, but it is important that he address his comments through the Chair as per the tradition in our Standing Orders.

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Through you, Mr. Speaker, does the member agree with me that this would certainly offend the Charter of Rights and Freedoms?

In talking about the terms of reference when the inquiry was announced, the member said, “Well, they are certainly broad. There is no denying that the early indications are that the terms of reference will allow people to go where they have to go”. What is the change that occurred since he made that statement?

Mr. Peter MacKay: Mr. Speaker, there was no change at all. They are broad, but they are not broad enough. Clearly it came to light as time went on that the mandate was limited by the Prime Minister deliberately. In fact, the Auditor General suggested that there be an examination as well of the polling data and the polling contracts that were being doled out by the Department of Finance, at that time the Prime Minister. This mandate for Gomery does not include that.

I totally disagree that somehow again the Liberal Party, through an act of convenience, wraps itself in the charter. The criminal investigations are not marred in any way by the recommendations of Mr. Justice Gomery, whatever those recommendations might be. There are numerous examples. I point to some of them, the Patricia

Starr inquiry, the Westray inquiry, the Walkerton inquiry, the tainted blood inquiry, where we saw criminal charges laid and a guilty plea rendered just yesterday. To suggest otherwise is pure folly.

Those inquiries were not stalled in any way from doing their job by virtue of the fact that there were criminal investigations going on. I know about Westray because it happened in my constituency, a very tragic occurrence in a mine in Plymouth, Nova Scotia. The criminal convictions that were received yesterday in the tainted blood inquiry similarly demonstrate that these exercises can happen simultaneously.

The commissioner, I would suggest, can add to the work that has to be done in a criminal investigation and the subsequent trial.

The reality here is that the Liberal Party itself should be under investigation, the entire Liberal Party as an organization, just as the Red Cross organization was the subject of a criminal investigation. The difficulty, of course, is the RCMP themselves. I am quoting from Greg Weston's article where he said:

Of course, the Mounties themselves were up to their musical ride in almost \$2 million of sponsorship cash, much of it hidden in a non-government bank account in Quebec.

I am not casting any aspersions whatsoever on the good, hardworking, honest members of the RCMP who are the pride of this country, but it is within the upper echelons where we find that, much like senior bureaucrats, they can be co-opted and corrupted into the government's activities.

The government was involved in a conspiracy against the public trust, defrauding the public of hundreds of millions of dollars, much of which went into its political coffers for partisan purposes. That is the subject of the investigation. That is the subject of the inquiry. We should get all the facts. Canadians will ultimately be the judges of who is responsible. I think it may lead right to the Prime Minister's door.

Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague who spoke before me put it the way we all feel about this topic. Canadians have looked at this and Canadians have heard the discussion around the Gomery inquiry. I believe that Canadians think that the Gomery inquiry is the answer, that Gomery will come back to the public and tell them what went wrong, who is responsible and assign that accountability to those people.

Unfortunately as time goes on and as we get further into the inquiry we find that is not the case. We are here today to bring this motion forward and ask the Canadian people and the House as it sits here today to make a decision to support that. Canadians want the Gomery commission to provide them with the answers they believe they are going to get at the end of the inquiry.

It is beyond me how a government can sit there and make millionaires of its friends and cohorts while hard-working taxpaying Canadians submit their dollars to Ottawa to spend in their best interests, providing for health and education, supplies and equipment for our armed forces. All those people have been deprived in some way because of this scandal.

Supply

Canadians will be deprived of their opportunity to get an answer. We have heard in committee after committee. We have listened to the public come forward about things that they were unable to do in the past several years on the premise that the money was not available. We know where the money went and we know to whom it went. Mr. Justice Gomery is proving that to us day in and day out.

I want to choose my words very carefully. I think the government of the day has made Canadians believe that Gomery is the final answer. We hear it every day when the minister stands to answer questions. He says, "Let Gomery do his work. Let Gomery report. Let Canadians make their decision after Gomery has reported".

The actual clause that we are talking about here in this debate says the following:

the Commissioner be directed to perform his duties without expressing any conclusion or recommendation regarding the civil or criminal liability of any person or organization—

When I hear that and I listen to what the minister across the floor says when he is answering questions, I am getting mixed messages. I am getting a message from the government that the Liberals want to get to the bottom of this scandal. They want people to hear the answers. They want those accountable to be held accountable. Yet the government has included a clause in the judge's terms of reference that does not allow him to do that.

I think we have all had the wool pulled over our eyes if we believe that Judge Gomery is going to be able to do that, unless we pass the motion that has been put forward today.

The people of Canada deserve to know who was responsible for directing millions of dollars. They have a right to know. It is Canadian taxpayers' money. It is not Liberal government money to spend as the Liberals choose, to dole out to their friends, to fake invoices so that they can create some revenue for a group of people who then funnel it back to the Liberal Party of Canada to run elections.

We now know that this did not involve just one election. It has been the past three. Should we have fallen into an election in the last few days, who is to say, could it have been four? Who is to say, did it happen before that?

That is what this entire debate has been about. It is about accountability of government. Does the government not want the Canadian public to trust it? Do the Liberals not want Canadians to respect us all as parliamentarians, as hon. members to give them the truth as a judge would see it, to hold people accountable?

● (1610)

We talk about our justice system in this world and every time someone gets into a position of having to be accountable, they lower the bar, so that person does not have to be accountable for it. Canadians want that to change and they want it to change with Gomery.

As I travelled throughout my constituency last week that is the one statement that I heard over and over, "Let Gomery finish". My constituents told me that they were convinced that he is going to give us the goods. He is going to tell us who is accountable, who should be charged, and who should be punished.

When they find out that is not his job and not his role, they are completely offended that a government would say publicly that it was its intent to get to the bottom of this. We all heard the Prime Minister give a speech on national TV that was not about anything that was of historic interest to Canadians or of value to Canadians but only to the Liberal Party. It was only said in defence of the Liberal Party.

It has been said several times and I think it is worth reiterating that this is a Liberal problem. It is not a provincial issue. It is not a Canadian issue in the sense that it has been created by other Canadians. It has been created within the Liberal Party.

As I watch the Gomery inquiry I see high ranking Liberal officials coming forward every day and spilling their information. These are not allegations that these people are making. This is testimony. These are confessions. These are people trying to do everything they possibly can, I suspect, to point the finger across the entire lot, which I think is what is happening. I think people are starting to see that. The unfortunate part with the Gomery inquiry, the way it is set up right now, is that we will never know who would be accountable at the end of the day.

This morning I listened to a few of the comments made by the members opposite. They argued as to why it should not happen. They said that it would obstruct the RCMP investigation. It would hinder the police investigation. I do not believe there would be any danger in letting Mr. Gomery indicate responsibility. It will not hurt the RCMP. In fact, it might actually help it.

However, we have to question why clause (k) was included and was it part of the bigger picture that the government knew at the time.

The government today is claiming that changing the terms midway through the investigation would imperil the results. I do not know how it would. I have not heard anyone explain it today. I believe that allowing more tools to access the truth and report on it can only help us all get to the bottom of it and help all Canadians understand.

We have seen and we are part of history in Canada where a government has taken advantage and abused its ability through a taxation system to funnel money back into its own coffers for its own personal benefit. Personally I take offence to that. That is not why I was elected. That is not why I ran to be a part of Parliament. I ran to have people respect me and to do the right things for the right reasons. I think we see day after day that it is breaking down.

Unfortunately, I think we all suffer because of that. We have seen in history that governments that take advantage and take for granted the taxpayers of the country or the province that they represent are eventually punished, but in the same way many of the good people who put their names forward are painted and tarnished with that same brush. I personally resent that.

The motive behind bringing this motion forward is to inform Canadians who all believe that they are going to get an answer at the end of the day.

Supply

I ask the Liberal government and the members opposite to really look hard. If they really believe that the Canadian public should get the answers and the truth, they will have no problem supporting this motion. They will have no problem supporting the fact that at the end of the day Judge Gomery will report. He will name names. He will make people accountable which is what we all want as Canadians.

• (1615)

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the people of Brandon—Souris are very well represented by the member. The member talked about respect for parliamentarians. I know his constituents certainly respect their representative. Could the member explain how, by supporting the Conservative motion, it would help bring integrity back to Parliament, after it has been harmed by the government?

• (1620)

Mr. Merv Tweed: Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day we all want to stand in the House and go back to our communities to face the people who elected us. If members can look constituents in the eye and tell them that they have done the best to bring the truth forward, not the best that satisfies members' needs or makes it easy for them to be accountable to people but actually told people the truth, that is how I believe men and women are measured and how all parliamentarians should be measured.

Mr. Peter MacKay (Central Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, speaking of truth, I want to put something on the record that occurred earlier in the debate. The member for Kings—Hants, who was parachuted into cabinet and is now the public works minister and human shield for the Prime Minister on the Gomery inquiry, stated in his quote from Justice Gomery:

I am entitled to draw conclusions as to whether there has been misconduct and who may be responsible for it.

The member stopped there. Mr. Justice Gomery went on to say in the next breath:

Such findings will be the focus of the inquiry only to the extent that they are necessary to carry out the mandate in the terms of reference.

The terms of reference are clearly important here. Mr. Justice Gomery himself stated:

Its future findings of fact and statements of opinion will be unconnected to normal legal criteria, and will be intended to serve as the basis for the recommendations which I will be making as required by paragraph (b) of the terms of reference.

This is the point. Paragraph (b) in the terms of reference states that the commission may make recommendations to prevent mismanagement of sponsorship programs or advertising programs in the future and that the commission may take recommendations to change the Fiscal Administration Act and, finally, the commission may report on the respective responsibilities and accountabilities of ministers and public servants as recommended by the Auditor General of Canada.

There is no responsibility, no naming of names, and no accountability. Mr. Justice Gomery says that himself. The minister of selective quotes once again engages in misleading the Canadian public as to what Mr. Justice Gomery has a mandate to do. They are deliberate attempts to mislead the public as to the mandate of Mr. Justice Gomery. This is all part of the cover-up. It is all part of the

government's attempt to avoid accountability. It is all about burying the truth.

Mr. Merv Tweed: Mr. Speaker, as I said in my earlier comments, that is the problem. I believe the Canadian public believes that Gomery will report and give a full accounting. Unfortunately, we know that he cannot. We know that he is restricted by the clauses that were put into his contract. All we are asking is to let that truth come forward and that people be held accountable at the end of the day. When our children do something wrong, we try to make them accountable to make them better adults. I think it is time for the government to do the same.

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Okanagan—Coquihalla, Iran; the hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie, Social Development.

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to the motion put forward by the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands. This motion seeks to amend section (k) of the Gomery commission's terms of reference.

Let me begin by saying that I cannot and I will not support this motion. It seeks to make a fundamental change to the Gomery commission that would, in my submission, upset the entire process. Justice Gomery has been hearing testimony since last September and is scheduled, I understand, to conclude within the next week or two. It is very late in the game to start changing the rules, especially rules governing the mandate of this very important inquiry.

These rules are very clear. They are not arbitrary rules. There is no ambiguity in the rules. They are laid out in the Inquiries Act. They are much different than those of courts or tribunals because a public inquiry serves a much different purpose and in the context of the sponsorship program, the Gomery commission serves a very specific purpose in the government's course of action.

As my colleagues will remember, the Prime Minister, on his very first day of office, immediately cancelled the sponsorship program. Since then he has taken many definitive steps to deal with this particular issue. A criminal investigation has been launched. Comptrollers were put in every department to monitor government spending. New rules and ethical guidelines were put in place for public office holders. A special counsel was appointed to recover lost funds. Civil claims were filed totalling almost \$41 million against 19 companies and individuals, and the commission of inquiry into the sponsorship program and advertising activities was created. This is what is commonly referred to in Canada as the Gomery commission.

Each of these actions served a specific purpose. The Prime Minister and the government have been fighting corruption. We need to find the people responsible, but we also need to identify the different factors that allowed such wrongdoings to occur and that need to be changed to prevent further wrongs. This is the role of the Gomery commission.

Supply

I come before the House with a certain experience in this whole issue. I have served for the last three or four years on the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts. Last February when the Gomery commission was announced and even before other committees were up and running, the Prime Minister, as one of his steps, mandated the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to immediately start looking at this whole issue.

We went for about four or five months. We heard from about 80 or 90 witnesses. We did sit, between February and May of last year, four days a week and we heard from most people in government who had to do with the program, a lot of the private advertising firms, the bureaucrats, and the civil servants who actually operated the program. Although it was a lot of hard work, it was a very interesting and challenging experience.

I did find the allegations troubling and disturbing, and the people in Charlottetown did not send me to Ottawa to justify the unjustifiable or to defend the indefensible. They were very troubling sets of circumstances.

At the end of the day we wrote a report. It is a very good report. I am not sure that everyone in the House has read the report, but speaking from my own vantage point, we identified a lot of the systemic or general issues that caused this problem to arise.

It was a very small program, with about eight civil servants administering it on behalf of Public Works and Government Services Canada, but the program unfortunately was allowed to be established outside of what I consider to be normal government rules and regulations.

• (1625)

It did not appear to be subject to normal Treasury Board rules and regulations or the Financial Administration Act. In doing this, it is my opinion that the minister failed to operate this small department in the best interest of Canadians and especially Canadian taxpayers. His excuse was that he did not have time to operate or run his department. That was not a valid excuse.

In my opinion, the deputy minister also failed Canadians. It was his job to see that the program operated within the Financial Administration Act and within Treasury Board guidelines. The internal audit branch of the Department of Public Works also missed this particular situation on two occasions.

The Prime Minister, to his credit, took a number of steps. I will not go over each and every step but one of the steps he did take was to establish the Gomery commission and to give it a very broad mandate which is set out in section 13 of the Inquiries Act. In his opening remarks, Mr. Justice Gomery was unequivocal in his duty to Canadians. He had the duty to find responsibility, to find misconduct and to ascribe responsibility.

As I indicated earlier, at the time the Gomery commission was established the previous member from Central Nova agreed with the mandate and said:

Well, they're certainly broad. There's no denying that the early indications are that the terms of reference will allow people to go where they have to go.

He certainly agreed with my comments back then but there have been some intervening factors and obviously, from his statement in

the House in the last half hour, he has come 180° on this particular matter.

Now we have a motion before the House which I cannot for one minute support. As I can understand it, the Conservatives first want Mr. Justice Gomery to be given the power to find people guilty of criminal behaviour. Second, they want to give Mr. Justice Gomery the power to assign civil responsibility which would state that so and so owes so and so money.

That offends the charter of rights, the Criminal Code and all the rules of court of all 10 Canadian provinces and the 3 territories. We have in Canada a well-established system of criminal and civil law. If people want anything further they can go to the charter of rights where it is set out. It says that if a person is to be charged criminally he or she has to be charged. It has to be done by an indictment or under summary conviction. The offence is disclosed and the prosecutor is obliged to present the evidence as to what the charge is. Pursuant to the charter of rights, the person is entitled to retain and instruct counsel. There is a well-established body of evidentiary and procedural rules governing a criminal trial.

The roles of the investigative function of government and the prosecutorial roles are separated. The accused, after going through the charge, the evidence and the disclosure, is entitled to a trial, and the prosecutor, and this is very important, to get a guilty verdict, whether it be before a trial judge or a trial by jury, has to prove the case beyond a reasonable doubt.

• (1630)

If I understand the motion put forward today, all that I have said over the last five minutes is taken and thrown right out the door. The opposition motion asks that Mr. Justice Gomery be given the power to assign criminal responsibility. Let me give an example and take it to the end conclusion.

People are invited or subpoenaed to appear before the Gomery commission. They go and give their evidence to the best of their ability. They then go home but do not follow the inquiry that closely. Maybe three, four, six or nine months later they pick up one of the national newspapers and read that they have been found guilty of a criminal offence that carries a minimum sentence of six, eight or ten years. For anyone who may be listening, I should say that I am not making this up. The next step, if I follow the argument and the rationale that is being stated in this House, the next thing that will happen is that the police will put them in jail with a minimum sentence of six, eight or ten years.

I want to talk about the second part of the motion. Not only do the Conservatives want Mr. Justice Gomery to ascribe criminal responsibility, they want him to be given the power to ascribe civil responsibility. If this were to go on in Canadian courts under our system of jurisprudence one would assume it normally would start with a statement of claim, properly prepared, properly filed and properly served.

Supply

People need to know whether they are being charged criminally. They need to know whether they are being sued. Information, knowledge and disclosure are fundamental to the system. The statement of claim has to be properly filed and served so the people being charged have the ability, if they wish, to file a statement of defence. If there is any dispute that cannot be resolved after discovery, after disclosure and after pre-trial examination of witnesses we then have a trial.

The trial may be held before a judge or, if the claim is above a certain amount, before a judge and a jury and the judge makes a finding of fact. I should point out, which I do not think has been pointed out in this chamber, that the onus in a civil trial is totally different. The onus there is not beyond a reasonable doubt, but it is in the balance of probabilities. After hearing all the evidence, the judge, or a jury properly instructed, would then make a finding of fact which would be the basis of the civil claim.

All that would be thrown out the door if we were to accept the logic and rationale of the motion. In this case the person would not have to go near the city of Montreal. I am not making this up. This is the gist of this motion. A person could buy the *Globe and Mail* and read on page 3 that Mr. Justice Gomery had found him or her or his or her company responsible to pay another entity, whether it be \$100,000, \$200,000 or \$500,000, and that would be the first knowledge that the person would have of that claim. That is not the way our Canadian system has been developed and I certainly do not want to be part of any motion that would throw out our well-established judicial system.

● (1635)

Clause (k) reads as follows:

the Commissioner be directed to perform his duties without expressing any conclusion or recommendation regarding the civil or criminal liability of any person or organization and to ensure that the conduct of the inquiry does not jeopardize any ongoing criminal investigation or criminal proceedings

That is exactly what we have seen. In at least two instances Mr. Justice Gomery, after submissions I assume by counsel, heard the evidence in camera. After hearing the evidence, and not wanting to prejudice or compromise what I believe were criminal proceedings, he looked at the evidence and then released most of it.

However, if we buy into the motion before us, the criminal proceedings, as far as I can see, would be a waste of time. Mr. Justice Gomery would make that determination. The only duty left to the criminal judge in another venue would be to sentence the individual criminals.

The motion does not make any sense. It is contrary to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Criminal Code. It is contrary to a lot of other Canadian statutes, rules and regulations.

Everyone wants to get to the bottom of this but this is just another step against Mr. Justice Gomery. It started when he was appointed. He was called a hack by the chair of the public accounts committee. That was the first thing the chair said. This has been going on day after day.

Canadians want the Gomery commission to finish its work and they want justice to be served, which is why I do not support the motion. I think it is ridiculous and I cannot and will not support it.

I again will quote the learned member for Central Nova when he looked at it in February. He said, "The terms of reference will allow people to go where they have to go". People will draw their own conclusions.

I will not support the motion because I find it troubling. I do not think it will have the support of the House.

● (1640)

Mr. Peter MacKay (Central Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the same vein as his floor crossing cousin from Kings—Hants, the hon. member opposite likes to selectively quote.

He asked me, rhetorically, what changed? Does he know what changed? We heard a litany of Liberals go before the Gomery commission and confess their involvement in criminal acts in attempts to defraud the public of public money for partisan purposes. Lo and behold, we find that the commission does not have the ability to make any recommendations as to responsibility.

We do not need to hear this nonsense about overlapping jurisdictions of civil and criminal responsibility. It is simply to make recommendations, as we saw in Krever, in Walkerton and in a number of public inquiries where there were simultaneous criminal and civil actions going on at the same time.

This is pure, unadulterated mendacious nonsense coming from the member opposite. He is trying to deliberately mislead Canadians about the terms of reference of the motion. He is deliberately trying to attract attention away—

The Deputy Speaker: I would ask the member for Central Nova to withdraw the words "deliberately mislead". You can presume or you can try to know what someone's motives might be, but certainly in here we assume that everyone is an hon. member. I encourage the member for Central Nova to withdraw the words "deliberately mislead".

Mr. Peter MacKay: Mr. Speaker, on your instruction, I withdraw the word "deliberately". I would suggest that the hon. member is misleading Canadians in what he has said.

He is also very amusing. He suggests that somehow the opposition does not want Mr. Justice Gomery to get to the bottom of the matter. By last count, none other than the former Liberal prime minister, Jean Chrétien, and the former Liberal Public Works minister and a long litany of Liberal Public Works ministers, who are tainted by this whole sordid affair, were launching a civil suit to shut down Mr. Justice Gomery.

I would like the hon. member, if he is honourable, to stand in his place and admit that the only individuals who have launched a court action to stop Mr. Justice Gomery are his former members of Parliament and his former leader, Jean Chrétien and Alfonso Gagliano. Those are the only individuals who have done so.

Nobody in this House, not a single solitary person, does not want Mr. Justice Gomery to get to the bottom of it. Some want him to get to the bottom of certain things quicker than others. We think that when we get to the bottom of it we will find that it actually leads to the very top of the food chain in the Liberal Party.

Will the hon. member at least be honest enough to admit that the only individuals attempting to shut down Justice Gomery through court action are Alfonso Gagliano and Jean Chrétien, two of the highest on the food chain in the Liberal Party?

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Mr. Speaker, I have been on the public record many times saying that I do not support any person or any individual who in any way compromises, interferes or attempts to delay the work and proceedings of Mr. Justice Gomery.

However, one point made by the member for Central Nova is misleading. He talks about this section (k) and he talks about other inquiries. This is a very common clause that is used in all inquiries. I will go over a few of them: the Arar inquiry; the Ipperwash inquiry; the Walkerton inquiry; the Stonechild inquiry; and the Grange inquiry. All of these were inquiries set up by the Conservative government, except for the Stonechild inquiry, which was set up by an NDP government.

I believe that our present Prime Minister deserves a lot of credit for taking the steps that he has and for establishing the public inquiry. I want to point out to the member for Central Nova that this was not always the case and I will specifically talk about his previous leader, the Right Hon. Brian Mulroney. After Mr. Mulroney left office, he took \$300,000 in cash in envelopes in hotel rooms with the lights turned down, as reported by William Kaplan. Mr. Mulroney laughed at Canadians and said, "It's none of your business. I paid taxes on it".

That shows the behaviour of and the credit that this House owes to our Prime Minister in taking all the steps that he did, including this inquiry. I think the inquiry should be allowed to proceed immediately, without delay, without compromise and without any further motions like this from the opposition.

● (1645)

Mr. Deepak Ohrai (Calgary East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague from the other side just mentioned the fact that all inquiries have similar language. He touted all the other commissions that have been brought in and said why they have similar language and should be the same.

The difference here is that this is all about the governing party. It is about the governing party's corruption. The Liberals are held responsible. Every day when we listen to the Gomery commission, who is out there? The Liberals are out there talking about corruption. It is their governing party that was responsible for this corruption, so here is what I want to ask the member. How can we have a commission with a reference that is similar to that of other commissions we have had when the mandate of this commission is different?

In this case, the mandate of the commission is simply to find out. Canadians want to know the truth and the truth has to deal with the Liberal Party. Why are the Liberals afraid to let the Gomery commission talk, take responsibility and say who was responsible for this fiasco?

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Mr. Speaker, I will again repeat what I said earlier. The terms of reference are extremely broad. They are well established by statute. The inquiry is taking place pursuant to section 13 of the Inquiries Act. Mr. Justice Gomery was very clear in

Supply

his opening remarks as to what his duties, responsibilities and objectives were.

To repeat, we have to make a distinction between the roles and duties of a public inquiry and our existing criminal and civil justice system. We cannot confuse the two of them. We cannot have a judge sitting on a public inquiry ascribing guilt, finding people guilty of criminal offences which may or may not put them in jail, and we cannot have a judge in a public inquiry finding civil responsibility for large sums of money when people who are subject to these charges or claims do not even know they exist. That is the fundamental point I want to make here today.

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, just to clarify in this debate the issue of the mandate of Mr. Justice Gomery, the magic words in the mandate, which the opposition alleges circumscribe the ability of Mr. Justice Gomery to complete his work, are a finding of "criminal or civil liability". He is not allowed to make a finding of criminal or civil liability. Those words stand by themselves.

I want to ask the hon. member about this. This would presumably not prevent the Gomery inquiry from reaching conclusions on facts. For example, if a person or a firm had billed falsely for certain work done, Mr. Justice Gomery could find a conclusion like that. That is a conclusion based on the facts but it does not reach a conclusion as to civil or criminal liability. Am I not correct?

● (1650)

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely correct. The mandate is clear. Mr. Justice Gomery can make findings of fact. He can find misconduct and he can ascribe responsibility for that misconduct.

I have one final comment. There is a member of the opposition who clearly understands this and that is the member for Calgary Centre-North. I will quote him from February of last year. This is very important, because the hon. member for Calgary Centre-North understood it:

As important as the public inquiry will be, it is no solution to criminal conduct. The purpose of a criminal prosecution is to prosecute criminals. The two are quite different and it is probably evident to most Canadians that the consequence of criminal conduct should be criminal prosecution and criminal sanction.

That member clearly understood the distinction. I agree with him. I support him. I wish that every other member—

The Deputy Speaker: On a point of order, the hon. government whip.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, discussions have taken place between all parties in order to expedite the recorded divisions scheduled to take place at the end of government orders on Wednesday, June 1, 2005. I believe that you would find consent for the following order:

Supply

That on Wednesday, June 1, 2005, the previous question motion affecting the motion to concur in the second report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, moved by the member for Kitchener Centre, be deemed carried on division;

that the previous question motion affecting the motion for the third reading of Bill C-9, moved by the member for Honoré-Mercier, be deemed carried on division;

and that the motion to concur in the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, moved by the member for Calgary—Nose Hill, be deemed carried on division.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

FINANCE

Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, discussions have taken place among all parties and I believe you would find unanimous consent for the following motion:

[Translation]

That, notwithstanding the order made on November 2, 2004, the Standing Committee on Finance be authorized to present its report on the study of fiscal imbalance by Friday, June 17, 2005, instead of Thursday, June 2, 2005.

[English]

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

•(1655)

[English]

SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—GOMERY COMMISSION

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise to speak to the motion put forward by the Conservative Party on the Gomery terms of reference. This commission is becoming a pivotal issue in Canadian political history. Its implications are far wider than we can imagine, as are the implications of its findings and its report. We have seen the Prime Minister on television pleading with Canadians to let the Gomery commission do its work before he calls an election, so a lot of things hinge on this.

What is of more importance about this commission is that Canadians are angry. For the first time, Canadians have seen the biggest political scandal in the history of this country. Everywhere we go, we see that Canadians are angry. They have put their trust in

the government. They said, “Here are our tax dollars”. They expect us to use common sense and fiscal responsibility in spending their money. What has happened is that their trust was completely shattered and absolutely broken.

But it took the Auditor General to point it out. The Auditor General said there was something seriously wrong. The trust that Canadians have put in government has been broken, battered and abused, as we have seen. Of course, then what did the Liberals do? They needed to protect themselves, so they called the commission because that trust was broken by the Liberal government, by the governing party.

Day after day in front of the commission, as I have stated, we see Liberals coming in and talking about how money was misused for their personal use, for gain for their party. Every day it is not a good picture for Canada, which prides itself on having a transparent system. The transparent system was broken and it was broken by the Liberals sitting on the other side and their friends out there.

What is amazing, as we can see from the reports coming in, is that this was done in election 2000. I was part of election 2000. Never could I have imagined that taxpayers' money would be used for personal gain by that party, that it would be used to gain votes. What is coming out at the commission is unbelievable.

There is anger out there and the Liberal Party knows it. The Liberals know that something rotten happened. They know that something wrong happened.

It is amazing. I am talking about election 2000. How many members sitting on the other side are from election 2000? They get up and pretend that this was something from the distant past, that these are new faces and they do not have anything to do with the past.

So we have the commission. We have heard what the Prime Minister says when he gets up. Of course, day after day the public works minister, a new face because the old face is gone, says quite simply, “Let us wait for the Gomery inquiry”.

Yet the Prime Minister had no problem firing the former public works minister when he was our ambassador to Denmark. It did not take him long. It begs the question: why did he fire him? Obviously the Liberals knew something was wrong. We saw them fire the CEO, Mr. Pelletier. Why?

So actions have already been taken which the Liberal Party knows are pointing a finger at them about what was rotten and what went wrong. Canadians want to know. First, through the commission they want to know how. Then they want to know why this happened. We all know why it happened. It is not a big secret.

•(1700)

They want to know how. Through the hearings of the commission we are finding out how it happened. They also want to know who is responsible and who will take the blame? That is the crux of the motion we are debating. As has been stated, the government in clause (k) in the terms of reference has said, “without expressing any conclusion or recommendation regarding the civil or criminal liability of any person or organization”.

Supply

That says it quite clearly that the Gomery commission cannot point out who was responsible. That big question will remain. If the Gomery commission is let go without answering that question, Canadians will have no confidence in the political system of the country. We have to gain back the trust in this institution. We are held responsible for the use of taxpayer moneys. As I stated before, that trust has been broken.

All we are asking for is that Justice Gomery be allowed to name names and assign responsibility. Subsequently, the RCMP and other enforcement agencies can pick up whatever evidence comes out of that. It is important that Canadians know.

We all know it was the Liberal Party. It was under its rule. The Liberals are the ones who benefited the most. Therefore, it is not the issue who is responsible. We know it is them. We want to know who did not fulfill the responsibility of his or her job. We want to know people ultimately will be held responsible.

I will be sharing my time, Mr. Speaker, with my colleague, the member for Okanagan—Coquihalla.

Back to the main subject and that is the political landscape has changed. We now have a minority situation and hopefully we will not in the next election. We will throw those guys out hopefully and we will take over. We are telling Canadians that we will bring responsibility and transparency. One of the platforms we are looking at is giving more resources to the Auditor General to ensure that Canadians feel that their tax dollars are being spent wisely by the government.

Canadians are law-abiding citizens. They do not mind paying taxes. Ours is an honour system. We ask Canadians to be truthful about how much money they earn. Then we tell them how much they need to pay so we can run the government responsibly. Canadians agree to that. Yet when that trust is shattered, they must be made aware of the answers.

It is absolutely necessary and important that we know the commission can say who was responsible for this. That is what the motion states. I know the members of the Liberal Party will not support the motion because they are on the hot seat.

Hon. Walt Lastewka (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the Gomery commission began, Justice Gomery repeated very clearly in his opening remarks that:

I am entitled to draw conclusions as to whether there has been misconduct and who may be responsible for it.

In fact, he used an example:

—whether there was political influence involved in the activities and, if so, by whom, to what purpose, and to what effect...whether any person or organization in the Government of Canada gained an advantage financially, politically or otherwise from the activities and, if so who, to what purpose, and to what effect;

I understand the NDP gets it. I understand the Bloc gets it. The members of the government on this side get it. I have a hard time to understand why the member and his party do not get it.

Did the member not read or not hear what Justice Gomery said very clearly?

● (1705)

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, precisely, he just said it, so why is he having difficulty supporting this motion? This is exactly the motion. You should be supporting it.

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I could just encourage the member to address his comments through the Chair.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, again I am asking the hon. member this. He said fine, so why is he having difficulty supporting this motion? If he thinks that what Gomery has said has been done, then he should support it. Why are the Liberals standing now saying that they cannot support the motion, using all kinds of excuses?

However, to continue on this, he said that such findings would be the focus of an inquiry only to the extent that they would be necessary to carry out the mandate in the terms of reference. The reference that is there does not allow that to happen.

Mr. Stockwell Day (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at this juncture I believe it is important to read the precise wording of the motion before us. The reason for that is most Canadians I talk to are absolutely unaware that Mr. Gomery is so restricted in terms of what he may or may not come up with in the process of his inquiry. The motion states:

That this House call on the Government to amend section (k) of the Gomery Commission's terms of reference to allow the Commissioner to name names and assign responsibility.

It is quite amazing. Most Canadians are absolutely shocked at all the money, time, witnesses, effort and energy going into this commission and at the end of the day, Mr. Gomery is not going to be allowed by law, by the terms of reference of the commission, to assess responsibility.

I challenge any of the Liberal members opposite to go for a walk with me after I am finished my remarks. I will buy them coffee. We will go for a walk down the street, stop people and ask, “Are you aware that Mr. Gomery is not allowed to name names or to say at the end of the investigation where the responsibility lies?” I will guarantee that 9 out of 10 citizens on the street will say that we have to be kidding and ask us why we are doing this.

Liberal MPs are saying that Mr. Gomery said this or Mr. Gomery said that. Judge Gomery has all the right intentions and a huge task before him. I do not diminish that one bit. In fact, clause (k) of the Gomery commission states:

the Commissioner be directed to perform his duties without expressing any conclusion or recommendation regarding the civil or criminal liability of any person or organization...

I find that is amazing. I again challenge any of the MPs to come with me. I will guarantee that 9 out of 10 Canadians do not know that at the end of this multi-million dollar commission Justice Gomery cannot assign responsibility or even suggest who is responsible.

Supply

I think well intended citizens will ask us what the point is. That is what the Conservatives are asking, what is the point? The Liberal government has used these tactics before with similar commissions. The Krever commission on tainted blood, the Somalia commission and the APEC commission all went the same way. It is a deliberate method to tire Canadians, to get them so afflicted with scandal fatigue that they will be glad the thing is over.

Too much has gone on to allow people who are responsible to escape being held responsible. This is not us, it is the Auditor General who has said that this is the biggest financial scandal in the history of the country.

An hon. member: Hardly.

Mr. Stockwell Day: Somebody over there just said hardly. Members over there can question the Auditor General if they want, but that is what she said. This shows how the Liberals so diminish this tragedy in their own minds by saying that it is hardly a problem. I can remember the former prime minister saying that it was a few million dollars and that people were going to steal a few million dollars. Just a few million is absolutely unacceptable and we are into the tens of millions, possibly the hundreds of millions.

Judging from the types of questions we are hearing from the Liberal MPs, this is a wonderful opportunity for them to actually show their sincerity. If they are saying it is no big deal, then support the motion. If they are saying they want to see people held responsible for this, we want them to be named. If they are saying that is what they want, then they should support it.

• (1710)

One member of Parliament said this is frivolous. I invite the Liberal members of Parliament to come out on the street with me right now and ask people on the street who are footing the bill. Ask them if they think it is frivolous the opposition to simply ask that Mr. Gomery be allowed to name names and assign responsibility. I would challenge any one of them over there to come with me as soon as we are finished. They are shaking their heads and saying no, they do not want to do that. They do not want to face the people. That is all the motion is asking. It is not frivolous and is not something to be laughed at. It is very simple.

If the Liberal MPs are sincere, if the commission is not set up as a giant smokescreen and they want to demonstrate that to the people of Canada, they simply have to vote with us to allow Justice Gomery to name names. It deserves to be mentioned.

I was a former finance minister who sat with other finance ministers around the finance ministers' table with the present Prime Minister when he was finance minister. He knew every single provincial fund we talked about when we were asking for money for health care, post-secondary education and some of the environmental issues related to Kyoto. When he said no to all of those things, he could quote the name, the number, the chapter and the verse of why that money could not be sent. He knew every fund and if he did not have it right at his fingertips, he had officials sitting with him. He could snap his fingers and they knew where every dollar was. They said they had turned over everything and they could not find the money for health care.

Members will recall that is how he reduced the deficit. He slashed the health care transfer to the provinces overnight without warning by 34% and it was gone. He knew where every dollar was and why he could not give money to the provinces. He knew every fund and now he says that for 10 years, as he sat as finance minister, he had no idea where hundreds of millions of dollars were being blown out the door. Sheila Fraser found out and discovered the biggest financial scandal in the history of the country.

We had a federal finance minister who is now the Prime Minister saying he knew nothing. There is responsibility to be assigned and if responsibility is not assigned as this process unfolds and unrolls, and nobody is brought to task, nobody stands up, and nobody steps up and takes responsibility, government MPs on that side will never fear the voters again. The types of people who would rob from taxpayers, rob from Paul to pay whoever else they want to pay, they will never fear a commission again. They will never fear the law. They will never fear the RCMP. If people get away with this, there will be no fear for those who want to steal from taxpayers again.

We are asking the Liberal MPs to show their sincerity, simply vote with us and support the motion. That is all we ask.

• (1715)

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:15 p.m. it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the business of supply.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion, the nays have it.

And more than five members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

And the bells having rung:

The Deputy Speaker: The chief government whip has requested that the vote be deferred until the end of government orders tomorrow.

Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. There have been discussions among all the parties and I think you would find unanimous consent to see the clock as 5:30 p.m.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[Translation]

INCOME TAX ACT

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ) moved that Bill C-306, an act to amend the Income Tax Act (public transportation costs), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-306, an act to amend the Income Tax Act (public transportation costs). This enactment amends the Income Tax Act to allow an individual to deduct certain public transportation costs from the amount of tax payable.

Public transportation includes a public transportation service by bus, subway, commuter train or light rail. Of course, the definition included in the bill is not restrictive and could be expanded in time to other types of mass transportation.

In 2005, everyone believes that promoting public transportation must be a priority. The purpose of Bill C-306 is, essentially, to provide Quebec and Canadian taxpayers with a tax deduction for the cost of their bus or train pass, in order to further encourage them to make greater use of the various modes of public transportation. That was the basic objective of the bill: to encourage people to use means of transportation that are far more economical and ecological and at the same time lessen the pressure of vehicular traffic on our highway systems.

I do not think there is any point in making a long argument to demonstrate the benefits of making public transportation a priority, nor of the necessity of doing so. We all agree on this and there have been public awareness campaigns around it for some years. All manner of organizations have carried out studies to demonstrate its merits and are seeking solutions to increase its use.

However, despite all the virtues ascribed to public transportation, it has often been overlooked by governments. A tax incentive alone will obviously not set everything right and make it possible to achieve this objective. Some people will say that it is one thing to favour increased use of public transportation, but that does not solve the infrastructure needs. I agree entirely. And here, I must point out one important detail, and that is respect for the jurisdictions of Quebec and the provinces.

The federal government's actions must be in its own areas of jurisdiction. It should be remembered that funding for public transportation is an exclusive jurisdiction of Quebec and the provinces. It is obvious, though, that the needs are great and Quebec's financial capacities are limited—we all know why. For many years, there has been a serious problem with the fiscal imbalance, which undermines the Quebec government's ability to meet the needs of municipalities, particularly in regard to financing public transportation infrastructure.

The federal government has too much tax room in comparison with its responsibilities. We have been saying so for a long time, but

Private Members' Business

we can never say it enough: the money is in Ottawa while the needs are in Quebec City. The Bloc Québécois has been denouncing this situation at every opportunity and will continue to do so as long as the federal government has not responded to the mounting pressure to increase transfers to Quebec, without any conditions, of course.

Quebec must be the master of its own choices and priorities, and most importantly, have the fiscal room to respond adequately. Instead of interfering in areas under Quebec's jurisdiction, as it has a great propensity to do, the federal government should use the tools at its disposal, in particular by changing the Income Tax Act to provide the tax incentive proposed in Bill C-306.

What must be kept in mind are obviously the economic and environmental benefits of this measure in both the medium and long terms, which will outweigh any costs involved in granting this kind of tax deduction. We must avoid shortsighted strategies and instead make responsible, sustainable investments beginning right now.

Insofar as sustainable development is concerned, I would like to mention two aspects that should be taken into consideration to ensure such a measure is sound. People must be wondering why an incentive should be favoured by means of a tax deduction.

• (1720)

I would say that one of the most important aspects of public transportation has to do with environmental issues.

Without question, public transportation promotes a better environment by reducing greenhouse gas emissions, reducing energy consumption and enhancing quality of life and the urban environment.

This is the Kyoto era and we have a collective responsibility to find ways of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Public transportation is an effective way, is safer than transportation by car and provides better mobility. Heavy traffic in cities has an impact not only in terms of productivity, but also in terms of atmospheric pollution.

According to the most recent data from Statistics Canada, between 2002 and 2003, the number of cars increased by 5.5%, which represents close to 18 million cars on the highways of Quebec and Canada. Just think about that; it is huge. If nothing is done to encourage alternative modes of transportation, there will be harmful consequences in the very near future in terms of increased atmospheric pollution, the ability to get around in urban settings and the possibility of achieving Kyoto protocol objectives. There is an urgent need to take action and promote responsible transportation choices.

One responsible choice is to encourage public transportation and that is precisely the purpose of Bill C-306, to give an incentive likely to influence users directly.

Private Members' Business

Allow me to provide a few figures that speak for themselves. A 60 km commute can cost up to 10 times less with public transportation than with a car. To get from Longueuil to Montreal on the metro might take 10 minutes, while sometimes you have to bank on over an hour by car, regardless of weather or traffic conditions.

The bus produces up to nine times less greenhouse gases than the car. The metro causes even less pollution since it runs on electricity. A full bus represents between 40 and 50 cars during peak hours, which translates into over 175 tonnes fewer greenhouse gas emissions a year. These figures confirm, beyond any doubt, that environmentally speaking, public transportation is paramount and a tangible way of contributing to a healthy environment.

When debating a legislative measure such as the one before us today, we must give its economic impact serious consideration, too. In this regard, it is obvious that public transportation also plays a major role, for example, by reducing the costs related to traffic congestion for companies and drivers. Economic growth in Quebec and the major urban centres depends on an efficient, rapid transportation system that improves mobility.

Clearly, everyone is a winner: companies will be more competitive, particularly in the context of guaranteeing just-in-time delivery, and users will realize substantial savings. This means direct economic benefits for the community as a whole.

I refer members to an important study published by the Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal entitled, "Public transit: a powerful economic-development engine for the metropolitan Montreal region". According to this study, in 2003 alone, public transit enabled Montreal households to save almost \$600 million in travel expenses. These savings resulted in increased household purchasing power, which generated significant economic spin-offs for the greater Montreal region.

According to this same study, economic losses related to traffic congestion in Montreal are estimated at nearly \$1 billion annually, and public transit contributes directly to reducing losses caused by traffic congestion. Furthermore, a 2% increase in the modal share of public transit means 19 million fewer car trips in the Montreal region. The economic benefits total more than \$150 million annually. That is why it is important to promote the increased use of public transit. These are just a few, albeit very significant, examples.

• (1725)

In conclusion, I would like to point out that this proactive measure received unanimous support from various organizations concerned with public transit. These organizations and urban authorities responsible for managing public transit are on the lookout for initiatives encouraging users directly to use their services.

For the past ten years, some of them, including the Montreal transit authority, have requested tax measures from higher levels of government to encourage people to leave their cars parked at home.

They have been waiting a number of years already for governments to act. In the meantime, a broad coalition has been established over the years calling for measures that are cost effective in the short term, but sustainable in the long term.

There is a consensus on such a measure. All that is lacking is the government's political will to proceed and promote increased use of an essential public service that benefits not only users but society as a whole.

I am taking advantage of this debate to invite the federal Minister of Transport to be consistent for once with his remarks on December 12 in the *Gazette*, to the effect that the government should permit a tax deduction for bus passes. As we saw with the most recent budget, the Minister of Transport's powers of persuasion do not reach as far as his colleague in finance. Still, I invite him to be a little more persistent and fight this important battle within his government. It is an opportunity for the minister to make political hay and serve everyone's interests.

In closing, I invite all my colleagues in this House to support Bill C-306. It concerns people's quality of life, environmental protection and economic vitality. Today's decisions determine the course of the future.

• (1730)

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to take part in this questions and comments period as part of the debate on Bill C-306 introduced by my hon. colleague from Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher.

Here is a bill that meets two fundamental objectives. First, it will reduce the pressure on our highway system. Second, this is the kind of policy that Canada should have put in place many years ago. Why? Because, in order to meet our greenhouse gas emission reduction targets—a commitment made by the federal government under Kyoto—efforts must be made to ensure that Canada's taxation policy plays its role to the fullest.

Naturally, reaching this reduction target requires that the regulatory process follow its course. Also, there should be a shift from a voluntary approach to a more compulsory one for industries and for all sectors of economic activity in Canada. At the same time, it is important to ensure that the tax policy and tax instruments available to the federal government are effective.

In Canada, the federal government often refuses to adopt environmental fiscal policy. What is environmental fiscal policy all about? It is designed to provide tax incentives, tax deductions and tax credits to those who switch to better environmental principles.

As my hon. colleague pointed out, the federal government could very well have responded to this kind of initiative in its budget by including tax deductions or tax credits for the purchase of hybrid vehicles. That is the purpose of Bill C-306: to provide tax credits to public transportation users. Still, the government stubbornly continues to put forward greenhouse gas reduction plans, even though the results are an increase instead of a reduction.

Private Members' Business

The government has come onside with the opposition in adopting measures consistent with environmental fiscal policy.

To conclude, because I am running out of time, I will ask my hon. colleague this. With this type of policy, can Canada reach its targets in terms of greenhouse gas reductions?

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question and for the additional information that he provided.

Indeed, I think that a bill like this one can not only help users, as I mentioned in my speech, but can also send a positive message. Of course, it is the federal government that is responsible for the environment. It simply has to make a decision to send positive messages to the public and explain the importance of public transit and its economic and environmental impact. In my opinion, Bill C-306 is a good way to send positive messages to the public.

[*English*]

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today on private member's Bill C-306. The bill proposes that tax assistance be provided to those Canadians who use public transit. The intent of this measure is to promote the use of public transit in order to improve the environment. We all agree that this goal is a worthy one. However, the question is, is tax assistance for transit passes the best method to promote an increased use of public transportation? Based on numerous studies, the answer is no. There are much more effective ways than that.

For instance, the Liberal government has put in place infrastructure programs that make direct investments in public transit. Under the new deal for cities and communities we are making significant funding available to municipalities which they can use to address priorities such as public transit.

Since the mid-1990s the government has invested more than \$12 billion in its infrastructure programs. These include programs such as the \$4 billion Canada strategic infrastructure fund, the \$2 billion infrastructure Canada program, and the \$1 billion municipal rural infrastructure fund. We are using these infrastructure programs to fund projects across Canada, including public transit in our major urban centres. Let me take this opportunity to present some of these projects.

We have committed \$450 million toward the RAV transit line which will link the city of Richmond and Vancouver International Airport with downtown Vancouver. This rail link is planned to be operational and in service in time for the 2010 Winter Olympics and Paralympic Games in British Columbia.

Significant federal funding is also being directed toward public transit projects in Toronto. Some \$385 million is being provided to GO Transit to expand and improve its commuter services. A further \$350 million has been committed to help modernize and invest in capital renewal of the Toronto Transit Commission.

• (1735)

[*Translation*]

We are also committing \$103 million to renovate Montreal's metro.

The new deal for cities and communities is a priority for our government.

In fact, the first measures relating to this new deal were taken in 2004, including the full refund of the goods and services tax to municipalities. This measure will give municipalities new resources totalling some \$7 billion over 10 years, which they can use for major infrastructure priorities such as public transit.

We decided to go even further. In the 2005 budget, we pursued our commitment to provide cities and communities with reliable, long term funding, to help them meet their needs. In particular, we confirmed that we would give them \$5 billion over five years to support environmentally sustainable infrastructure, including public transit. The Minister of State for Infrastructure and Communities is already negotiating with the provinces and territories to reach an agreement on this funding.

These investments, and others, will result in a significant improvement in public transit services all across Canada. The improvement of these services will encourage people who normally use their cars to switch to public transit.

[*English*]

One of the key environmental challenges facing the world today is that of climate change. The government recognizes the importance of addressing these challenges.

In April 2005 my colleagues the Minister of the Environment, the Minister of Natural Resources and the Minister of Industry released "Moving Forward on Climate Change: A Plan for Honouring Our Kyoto Commitment" which will be used to guide the federal government's approach to implementing measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. I am pleased to report that key elements of this plan were funded in budget 2005.

[*Translation*]

These initiatives include \$1 billion for an innovative Clean Fund to further stimulate cost-effective action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in Canada and—in the event that the national interest is at stake, and Canadian businesses are contributing to reducing greenhouse gas emissions—for projects elsewhere.

[*English*]

There is a \$250 million partnership fund to deliver targeted support for large strategic projects that are jointly agreed upon priorities for the Government of Canada and provinces and territories.

There is an expansion of the wind power production incentive and a new renewable power production incentive to encourage the production of electricity from clean, renewable power sources.

Private Members' Business

[Translation]

They also include expansion of the EnerGuide for Houses retrofit incentive program. A total of 500,000 housing units will have benefited from this by 2010.

An estimated \$295 million in enhanced tax incentives through accelerated capital cost allowance will encourage investment in efficient and renewable energy generation.

In addition, a plan to develop a sustainable energy science and technology strategy in conjunction with the provinces and territories is scheduled by the end of 2006.

• (1740)

[English]

There is also a \$300 million enrichment of the green municipal fund, which makes investments in innovative green municipal projects in areas such as energy and water savings, urban transit and waste diversion to strengthen the sustainability of communities. Half of this amount will be targeted to the cleanup of brownfields, which are abandoned or idle properties where environmental contamination is known or suspected and where there is an active economic potential for redevelopment.

In total, budget 2005 targeted over \$4 billion in investments over the next five years for key initiatives included in the climate change plan, bringing total federal spending in support of measures to address climate change to over \$6 billion since 1997.

Existing climate change programming includes measures to support science, impacts and adaptation research, international work, policy development, public education and outreach, such as the one tonne challenge, and technology development and demonstration, such as funding for sustainable development technology Canada.

We understand that more action will be required in the future. The government has pledged to introduce additional measures as resources permit. We will continue to learn from our investments and international experience.

This government believes that the plan and climate change measures introduced in budget 2005, in combination with climate change initiatives already under way, will shift Canada toward a clean energy future and increase the efficiency, sustainability and international competitiveness of the Canadian economy, while moving toward our emissions reduction objectives under the Kyoto protocol.

[Translation]

Many initiatives will also be important to spur activities and to change behaviours in ways that mitigate climate change impacts and generate other environmental benefits, such as meeting Canadian objectives for reducing air pollution, since atmospheric pollutants and greenhouse gas emissions often come from the same sources.

In addition to addressing the problem of climate change, our government wholly supports the conservation and improvement of our environment. The government's commitment to this is illustrated by the environmental initiatives announced in recent budgets, over

and above those more directly related to climate change, which have exceeded \$7 billion since 1997.

These investments include measures to clean up contaminated sites; to design, implement and enforce framework legislation such as the Canadian Environmental Protection Act and the Species at Risk Act; to improve air and water quality and to invest in the development of environmental technologies.

[English]

Our actions show that this government takes our environment very seriously. We have invested heavily in infrastructure programs. We are putting in place a new deal for cities and communities. We have provided significant resources to address climate change and have developed a climate change plan for Canada. Clearly, we are doing our part and we are doing it through much more effective ways than providing tax assistance for public transit.

Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to speak to the private member's bill, Bill C-306. Listening to the last speaker, I cannot help but comment a little about the bragging that went on as far as the Liberal government. Let us quickly look at the facts.

In terms of Kyoto, we are now 30% above 1990 levels. Our commitment was to be 6% below 1990 levels. We obviously have a big failing grade on that one.

We have all kinds of programs that were announced. Yet as far as the OECD is concerned, of the 29 industrialized countries, in 2003 we were 24th out of 29. In the last report for 2004, we are now 28th out of 29 countries rated in environmental integrity by the OECD, the industrialized world. The last speaker probably should not be bragging about the Liberal record.

We have three cities still dumping raw sewage in the ocean. We still have about 10,000-plus federal contaminated sites, 50,000 other contaminated sites and no action on brownfields. We have the Sydney tar ponds.

I have been here since 1993. Every year I have heard the government say that it will clean them up. Guess what? Two or three weeks ago, we heard there would be another two year study on the Sydney tar ponds and that the government would clean them up. The poster child of the Liberal government is the Sydney tar ponds. I guess if I manage to survive here another 10 or 15 years, I will probably hear the government say that it will clean up the Sydney tar ponds.

We have boil water warnings. We have all kinds of environmental problems, such as smog days in Toronto, et cetera.

Before I got to the bill, I had to set the record straight from our last speaker.

Private Members' Business

The bill plans to give a tax credit for public transport. This is probably a good measure in the sense that it would go directly to the people who would be using it. Hopefully, it would have some effect on changing individual behaviour so public transit would become the way to go. Those are the kinds of things that we have to do.

For instance, I have a son and daughter who both live and work in Vancouver. They have great difficulties now because of increased costs. They are both using cars, both using transportation to take the kids to the babysitter, then going to work. In big cities like that it costs about \$600 to \$700 a month of cost for gasoline. They are still doing that.

However, I think if they were provided some kind of incentive, even though it might not be quite convenient, having rapid transit, or bus passes, or the subway or whatever, they probably would consider changing how they run their lives. The incentive of a tax break would probably have some effect on them.

We are trying to convince people that there are environmental benefits as well in using something like public transport. If we look at Canada's transport sector, we find that 27% of the greenhouse gasses released in this country come from transportation while .03% come from the various types of public transit. There would be a tremendous saving, whether it is sulphur dioxide, nitrous oxide or particulate matter. All those things that result in smog obviously could be helped greatly if we were to improve our urban transit system and the use of it.

As well we must also try to find a way to do something for rural people who feel the effects of increased fuel prices and the difficulties of getting around. I must admit I do not have a ready answer but I have some ideas. As well we should be emphasizing the clean air that could be brought about by various types of rapid transit.

• (1745)

As the critic for this area, I have a lot of people who lobby me, as I am sure they lobby many of the members in the House, on behalf of the fuel cell industry, the fuel cell buses, the propane buses and the natural gas buses. Almost all of them say that we do not have them Canada. They have them in Los Angeles and Beijing. They have orders for 1,000 for the Olympics in Beijing, but there are none in the big cities in Canada. Something is wrong with our system of promoting rapid transit.

It is interesting that Calgary, as an example, is using wind energy with its light rail and has promoted it as "ride the wind". It is one of the major purchasers of wind energy which runs all the light rail system in Calgary. That has become a major promotion item. It is amazing how many international guests comment on the fact that it is one of the first cities they have been in which uses a renewable energy source for its public transit. There is a great deal of pride there and an awful lot of bragging goes on by the people of Calgary. They are the envy of a lot of places.

What are the economic and social impacts of rapid transit? It reduces congestion, as the Bloc member pointed out. Congestion is a major problem in our big cities. Without building new roads, ultimately it becomes impossible to carry the loads of traffic that we might expect. There would be a saving there.

I have mentioned clean air and cutting out the pollution associated with that. There is more social mobility and reduced health problems. One of the reasons that countries like China and India are looking at some of these environmental problems in rapid transit is because of that health issue.

What we always have to remember, when we talk about Kyoto, air and what we might do, is we are a cold climate. We have large distances, few people and relatively little infrastructure to help us solve some of those problems.

A bill similar to this has been in the House before. It passed by 240 to 25. However, as with so many of the private members' bills that pass in the House, no action is taken on them. We hear about other programs and that there will be action. They are re-announced over and over, but the dithering that goes on in dealing with many of these is quite remarkable. I hope this bill passes and when it does, I hope something will be done about it and there will be direct action to help people in this area.

We can go to corporations and ask them to provide some incentives to their workers to take different means of getting to work. They give them incentives now like free parking spots or covering some of their costs. That is part of many contracts under which people work. Maybe if we could use rapid transit as a carrot for some of these people, it would be something that industry might buy into, particularly if we were to give them some tax credits for that kind of a promotion. There is so much that we can do in this area.

If I have one fault with this bill, it is the lack of detail in terms of how we would do this and how much it would cost. All of that would have to be worked out.

When we look at the G-7 or G-8 countries, we find that most of them, with Canada being the one exception, invest quite heavily in public transit. Public transit becomes one of their major conservation issues and one of the major ways to deal with smog and pollution in their large cities. We can learn a lot. We could go south of us and we would find quite a bit.

There is a lot of benefit to this. I believe it needs some fine tuning. I see the chair of the environment committee here. I would hope the environment committee could deal with this, fine-tune it and come up with some real solutions that would help solve our air problems in our major cities, and let us not forget the rural people whom we might be able to help as well.

• (1750)

Mrs. Bev Desjarlais (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join in the debate today. I want to thank my colleague from the Bloc for bringing the motion forward.

My colleague from the Conservatives mentioned a previous motion that had come to the House. It passed by the House on November 4, 1998, exempting employer paid public transit passes.

Private Members' Business

In 1998 the Liberal government had an opportunity to encourage ridership on public transit and it failed to implement it. I want to add that the current finance minister voted in favour of it. I find it hard to believe that he will be doing the same this time around, but it would be nice if he was not changing his tune so quickly.

I will read a fair bit from my colleague, Nelson Riis, who when he was here brought that motion forward. It says a lot about the bill of my colleague from the Bloc as well.

I am acknowledging that I am reading almost verbatim my colleague, the speech of Nelson Riis, so I do not get accused of using his words. They were great words and I will repeat them because they are just as good today as they were in 1998. He said:

We all pay tax on our earnings. Some benefits we receive from our employer must also be declared as income and are therefore income taxable. Employer provided parking and employer provided transit passes are both examples of benefits that are considered taxable under the federal Income Tax Act.

However, Revenue Canada's interpretation of this act provides loopholes allowing most employees to receive their free parking income tax free. Workers with this benefit save approximately \$1,722 annually. This is an incentive for commuters to drive and represents a significant loss of income tax revenue.

The government can address this bias by making employer provided transit passes an income tax exempt benefit.

This indicates that individuals would receive a direct benefit into their homes if this were made tax exempt. He further said:

This change would provide a rare opportunity for the federal government to seriously affect public policy at the local level.

I want to respond at this point because it clarifies the position of the member for Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, my Liberal colleague who spoke earlier. I wish I had the chance to question him because he said that studies showed there was no benefit to doing this. I would like to see those studies and at least get the name of them to review them.

My colleague also stated that in the United States when this exemption was brought in, and while both the amounts and the manner in which transit subsidies could be offered were limited, transit use increased an average of 25% among employees offered this benefit.

He said:

Obviously it was a significant change in emphasis. In San Francisco, for example, transit use among participating employees increased 31%, removing an estimated 17 million vehicle miles from the Bay area, avoiding 61 million tons of pollutants and generating \$1.6 million of new transit revenue.

To my colleague from the Liberals, where is his study to prove differently? I just indicated the one from San Francisco and that area that shows that it does work.

He went on to say:

All taxpayers benefit from decreased congestion. They benefit from health care savings, reduced infrastructure costs and reduced greenhouse gas emissions. Very few tax policies impact so favourably on so many Canadians.

Supporting public transit is not solely a transit issue. It is a health issue, it is a social issue. It is pollution issue. It is an environmental issues. It surely is an economic issue as well. It is a solid foot forward in the battle to meet our Kyoto obligations and it makes sense. It is cost effective and it has proven effective in other jurisdictions.

To those doubters out there, this is not just about giving a tax exempt break and someone is going to get a bit of a cost benefit. We

are going to have an overwhelmingly major cost benefit to our health care system and meet our Kyoto commitments, so there is benefit.

Again, it is not just the New Democratic Party that says this or in this case the Bloc that supports it as well. The representative of the Canadian Urban Transit Association stated:

Public transit can offer a major solution, but needs expanded capacity and ridership and incentive for Canadians to take transit, like tax exempt transit initiatives.

● (1755)

We all meet with the Canadian Urban Transit Association every year when it does its lobbying. I wonder how many of my Liberal colleagues told members of the Canadian Urban Transit Association that they were absolutely wrong and that they did not agree that tax incentives for public transit passes would not work.

If they are going to recognize these associations as being credible, then they should at least have the gumption to stand up and support some of the policies it says will work to increase public transit and reduce emissions in this country, the ultimate benefit going to the Canadian population.

The vice-chair of the association said that a change in the federal tax code to make employer provided transit benefits tax exempt would go a long way to allowing employers to offer a real incentive for people to switch from driving alone to public transit for their journey to work, something we have already done in the House. We voted on that in the House with the results being that 141 Liberals said that it would work. Only 23 Reformers, 39 Bloc members, 21 New Democrats, the whole kit and caboodle at the time, 15 Progressive Conservatives and 1 independent voted in favour of this. We had 4 Liberals and 21 Reformers who voted no while the rest must have been off vacationing somewhere. The reality is that Parliament voted saying yes that tax exempt public transit passes will work.

An hon. member: Overwhelmingly.

Mrs. Bev Desjarlais: We overwhelmingly voted in favour of it, including the finance minister. Has the government implemented it? Is that not what we do in Parliament? When Parliament says that we should do something, are we not supposed to do it? I thought that was why we were elected, why we got here and what democracy was all about, but the government has not done it.

We could have seen the benefits of this over the last seven years of less pollution and less vehicles on the road. Maybe we could have seen the need to go a step further and have it not just for employer paid public transit passes but for all public transit usage. Quite frankly, the same argument for any public transit usage being tax exempt is the one that was used for the employer paid public transit passes and certainly would be a benefit.

My colleague from Kamloops at the time, Nelson Riis, used very strong and positive words at the time. When one hears something good there is no point trying to rewrite it. I want to emphasize again that we have a situation where Canadian tax policy encourages people to use automobiles. Tax exempting parking spaces is a classic example.

We encourage that but at the same time we talk about wanting to be environmentally friendly and sustainable. It is time for Parliament, the government and the Prime Minister to actually say what they mean and follow through on what they say. It would be a real change and would probably shock the heck out of Canadians but it is time they did that.

Even if this motion should happen not to pass today, it is time to implement the one that was passed in 1998. I certainly hope this motion as well will get the support of this Parliament and just maybe the Liberal government will shock the heck out of Canadians and actually follow through and do what Parliament requested and voted on.

● (1800)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first, my congratulations to my colleague from the riding of Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher on presenting this bill.

I am pleased to speak as the Bloc critic for national revenue to Bill C-306, an act to amend the Income Tax Act (public transportation costs).

A person might well wonder about the reasons behind this bill. Why give public transit users a tax deduction? In the course of my remarks, I will try to answer the question.

This is not the first time a bill providing tax deductions for public transit users has been debated in this House. In 1999, Parliament passed a motion, 240 to 25, calling on the government to examine the question of a tax exemption for public transit use. In 2001 as well, Bill C-209 proposed similar objectives. It was very well received by this House, and outside it, by user groups. However, the bill was blocked by the Liberal government.

The government has always contended that it was seeking a better future for everyone through a variety of programs. Any measure promoting greater use of public transit will certainly contribute to the achievement of the objectives in this report. Such a bill would really encourage people to use public transit.

There is a lot of discussion of the Kyoto protocol. In this vein, the Government of Canada could adopt a specific measure and thus accomplish two things at once, by promoting the use of public transit and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

The measure could have an even more beneficial effect. It would help reduce highway congestion and the costs of building and maintaining roads and increase people's quality of life.

Clearly public transit is very economical for users. I might be allowed to demonstrate this. It costs about \$8,000 a year to own a mid size car, which does not include the cost of parking. The cost annually of public transit, which varies according to where people live in Quebec, is between \$500 and \$1,000, which is a huge saving.

Private Members' Business

It goes without saying that some will object, claiming this is a discriminatory measure since it does not affect all Quebecers and Canadians. My riding has several smaller cities in its regions. Residents of such small centres in rural areas with no access to public transportation will not benefit from this tax break. People living in rural areas do not always have established services like those in the cities.

Yet, this measure is beneficial to the entire population, since one of the most important parts of this bill is on providing a better quality of life for everyone.

● (1805)

The bill has not only a significant economic component but also an environmental component for improving quality of life for individuals.

In my opinion, the federal government must offer help to public transit users in the provinces and in Quebec to promote increased use of public transit.

Providing tax breaks will increase revenue for transit companies that could in turn provide better services in their community.

Despite the fact that Montreal—I think we must use Montreal as an example—is the place where public transit is used the most in North America, proportionally speaking, and that the use of public transportation continues to grow, unfortunately the use of the automobile is increasing at a faster rate. This phenomenon is seen in Canada, Quebec and other areas in the world.

Governments are facing a major challenge in motivating taxpayers to use public transit. To meet this challenge, the government will have to invest millions of dollars in renewing transportation infrastructure and equipment to ensure the sustainability and renewal of this community heritage. Just think of the metro in Montreal, which was built back in the 1960s; it will need a major facelift in the near future.

That is but the tip of the iceberg. Major investments are planned in Quebec. It is estimated that, over the next 10 years, the governments will be investing some \$4.6 billion, as compared to \$2 billion over the past 10 years.

In light of the many investments planned for the coming years, and given that part of the income tax, gas tax, and licence fees that taxpayers pay goes to public transit, I am wondering what measures governments could put in place to further encourage people to use public transit.

Adjournment Proceedings

Bill C-306 has one significant advantage. First, by creating a tax deduction, the federal government is intervening directly in its own area of jurisdiction. Furthermore, this is a concrete measure that will undoubtedly increase the revenues of various public transit authorities. More taxpayers will purchase monthly or annual passes instead of individual tickets.

Second, this will also benefit the transit authorities on the outskirts of urban centres. If we use, as an example, the Société de transport du Saguenay, which, in my riding, has three major terminals: Jonquière, Chicoutimi and La Baie, and a budget of nearly \$16 million annually, such a measure could mean increased revenues for this transit authority and act as an incentive for many residents thereby forcing some municipalities to add new routes and improve the public transit system.

In short, this bill is the ideal way to decrease traffic congestion in Quebec and Canada. If all users of public transit in the greater Montreal region were to drive, travel times would increase by 1.5 hours, tripling what they are now.

• (1810)

Such initiatives offer an affordable alternative to people who have become victims of rising gas prices.

Furthermore, our roads would last a little longer if we reduced the number of cars being driven. This would mean we would save millions of dollars each year on road maintenance and improvements.

I hope that Bill C-306 is adopted.

[*English*]

Hon. John McKay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will go through some of the points that need to be brought out in this debate. It is not a very happy task to bring the bad news to situations where on the face of it at least this appears to be a good idea. Who would disagree with the overall concept of trying to encourage the use of transit? Certainly, the government would not and no member in the House would. However, our basic position on the bill is, however well intentioned it might be, that it is a very costly initiative for a dubious benefit.

Hon. members know that the Government of Canada is quite fiscally prudent. They have only learned that recently, but they know that we are in fact quite prudent with the moneys that taxpayers entrust to us. We are glad to know that it has been a recent enlightenment on the part of the NDP.

The bill is of dubious effectiveness and it is not quite as fair as it might otherwise seem to be. The overall thrust of the bill is the desire to create more transit users. As I said earlier, there is no person in the House who does not agree with that intention. However, we also have to weigh costs against that encouragement and there is no clear evidence that it will generate the desired increases in public transit. So, costs need to be weighed against other considerations such as accessibility, convenience, comfort and personal preference.

Therefore, it comes as no surprise to anyone that study after study shows that the use of public transit is relatively insensitive to the cost for users. That is econo-speak. Transit users use transit for reasons other than cost, for reasons such as convenience and for reasons that

are personal unto themselves. In this instance we are looking for tax relief for the cost of using public transit. The studies show that this will create a relatively speaking small increase in ridership and members may say that even three more riders is good. Well, three more riders at what cost?

In this situation this would be accompanied by a very hefty price tag. Let us say for instance that the ridership was increased by 10%. That would cost the government in the order of about \$240 million upwards in the range of possibly as much as \$300 million, with 90% of the relief going to the people who are already using the transit system. Here we are paying out 90%, somewhere between \$240 million and \$300 million to people who are already using transit. That is a very expensive 10% increase in the ridership of a transit system.

In addition to questioning the effectiveness, I would also have to question the fairness of the bill. There is no doubt that most transit systems are in urban centres and urban centres would be the overwhelmingly large beneficiaries of this initiative as opposed to rural or other centres. As well, those who use other environmentally friendly means of getting from point A to point B would also be potentially disadvantaged.

• (1815)

The Speaker: I can tell the hon. parliamentary secretary that when the matter comes before the House again, he will have six minutes remaining in the time allotted for his remarks, which I know he will want to exploit to the fullest.

The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*English*]

IRAN

Mr. Stockwell Day (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the question I want to pursue is related to the tragic case of Zahra Kazemi. Coincidentally, I was able to meet today with Ms. Kazemi's son, who also met with the leader of the official opposition. We went over some of the issues.

I want to remind the minister as I pose the question that it was two years ago when this case began to unfold and Ms. Kazemi was arrested. We knew there was going to be trouble. When we heard of her death, we knew we could not believe the stories we were getting from the Iranian regime.

Adjournment Proceedings

First, we said the government had to show it was serious. Second, we said we had to bring home the ambassador right away. Third, we had to demand an open trial. Fourth, the government had to raise this at the United Nations right away. Fifth, we had to announce the possibility of sanctions; and sixth, we were going to demand that the remains of Ms. Kazemi be brought home.

The government did none of that. They played their tired old soft diplomacy game which does not work. Soft diplomacy does not work when dealing with hard tyrants. There is an understanding and it is a basic philosophical difference that we have, but it is very clear and history shows that appeasement does not work when dealing with these hard regimes.

I want to read a quote from the former leader of the Czech Republic, a brave and courageous individual. These are his comments on this issue. We should take it very seriously because these are people who have been there. These are people who have certainly paid the price and they know what they are talking about when we are dealing with tough regimes. On January 28 he spoke to all of Europe and said:

It is suicidal for the EU to draw on Europe's worst political traditions, the common denominator of which is the idea that evil must be appeased and that the best way to achieve peace is through indifference to the freedom of others. Just the opposite is true:—

People such as Nathan Sharansky who chronicles what he has learned from his years in prison and in the gulag, and suffering at the hands of oppressive regimes says and advises all governments that “the international community should never trust a state more than it trusts its own people”. The Iranian government does not trust its own people. It holds them repressively. It tortures, persecutes and kills.

We cannot trust a government that does not trust its own people. Yet, our government trusted the Iranian regime officials when they said to just leave it to them and not to worry. They said that they will find out what happened to Zahra Kazemi. Nathan Sharansky also said to be careful because any regime that does outrageous things to its people will do the same to other people. This is exactly what happened to Zahra Kazemi.

When the government got the conclusive evidence from a doctor in November of last year, what was our response? The doctor had done the autopsy and then escaped. He was safe and out of Iran. He said that this woman was tortured, raped and then she was murdered. What was our response in November after getting that news? We sent our ambassador back to Iran to normalize relations. That is abnormal behaviour. Why did it happen?

• (1820)

Hon. Dan McTeague (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to respond to this important matter raised by the member for Okanagan—Coquihalla.

The Government of Canada remains, as he should know, determined to pursue justice for the Kazemi family. I want to assure the member that this matter goes well beyond being just a simple consular case. It is also very clear that the violations of Ms. Kazemi's most fundamental rights have also attracted the attention of the entire international community.

The government has taken extraordinary measures to press for results in this case. We have clearly indicated our indignation and displeasure to the Iranian government. We will also continue to press for concrete changes in Iran's broader human rights performance.

Most recently, following the unsatisfactory outcomes of court proceedings of May 16 in Tehran, the hon. member was at the foreign affairs committee when the Minister of Foreign Affairs announced a tightening of Canada's controlled engagement policy toward Iran. These new measures will persist until Iranian authorities are prepared to deal with the Kazemi case in a serious and credible manner.

However, we have been very clear that these measures do not include the recall of our ambassador to Iran for which the member is asking. Since the tragic events leading up to and following Ms. Kazemi's death, we have twice recalled our ambassador in protest. The hon. member knows this. We did this to clearly express our indignation over Iran's handling of this case.

The message was clearly understood by Iran and the measures that the minister announced two weeks ago reiterates and entrenches our resolve. Recalling our ambassador yet again for these same reasons would do nothing to strengthen this message.

The information presented recently by Dr. Shahram Aazam has underlined the concerns that many Iranians, including members of the Majlis, have long expressed about Ms. Kazemi's brutal treatment while in custody.

When we were initially approached with word of Dr. Aazam's account in November of 2004, we were of course concerned for his safety and security. He had specifically requested safe haven in Canada. Of course, the Privacy Act also required that confidentiality be maintained. We did not divulge his account and this was, in my view, the responsible decision. The final decision to go public was taken by Dr. Aazam only.

We are continuing to pursue real results in this case. It would have been easy at any time to take draconian action by limiting or even breaking off our diplomatic relations with Iran. However, such a response would only have been detrimental to the defence of Canada's interests. Not only is recalling an ambassador a symbolic act, it hinders the outcome of necessary action and, most important, closes doors that need to remain open.

Our ambassador was asked to return to Iran because we have serious concerns that must be given the necessary attention. Our ambassador is in Tehran to deal with the Iranian authorities so justice can be done in the Kazemi case and he is there to apprise us of possible action within the Iranian system itself.

I want to point out that in all of this we do work with international partners. Canada's committed line of action has been taken by the minister. We believe that taking the draconian and the very difficult steps that the hon. member is proposing, while perhaps well intentioned and perhaps based on something that he calls soft diplomacy, would make it irrelevant diplomacy. We believe it is important that we find a solution to this case.

Adjournment Proceedings

We also understand that the son of Ms. Kazemi, Mr. Hachemi, has applauded the actions of the minister of May 17 and 18. We will continue to work to ensure that the case of Ms. Kazemi's death is not forgotten in the test of time.

• (1825)

Mr. Stockwell Day: Mr. Speaker, I met with the son of Zahra Kazemi not two hours ago. There was no applause coming from his hands; there was no praise coming from his lips whatsoever. He had only absolute distress and concern over the lack of action.

The hon. parliamentary secretary called the recall of our ambassador draconian and said it is not in Canada's interests. What about the interests of a woman who was captured, wrongly arrested, tortured, raped and murdered? Those are the interests we should be concerned about, the very human rights.

What did Canada do last week? There is a group called MEK, which CSIS has called a terrorist group. I have spoken to MEK, a group of expatriates from Iran who are opposed to the regime in Iran. I have made the case to them. They said that if we are committed to attacking innocent civilians, that is not good and not right, but at the same time we ban this group—

The Speaker: The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Hon. Dan McTeague: Mr. Speaker, I know the hon. member has informed the House that he has met with the family. There is no doubt in my mind and lawyers representing the family note that this is a very important step that the hon. member has taken.

If the hon. member is true to making these arguments as effective as he is trying to make them now, the last thing he would want to do is to preclude any opportunity for making these arguments where they belong, which is directly and clearly in Iran.

There is also the other issue which must be taken into consideration and that is Iran's lack of respect for international norms as they relate to nuclear proliferation.

Having tried and gone down the road of withdrawing our ambassador, we are responsible for Canadians abroad. There are other Canadians there. We want to ensure that this is not a question of abandonment of their rights and their opportunities.

We understand the Kazemi tragedy. We understand the murder. We understand the Iranian regime, but we must also ensure that we present absolute pressure to that regime to ensure that no other Canadian is subjected to that. This makes a better claim to the cause of human rights in that country to ensure that individuals are never affected like that again.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, over the last nine months I have asked the Minister of Social Development on a number of occasions to commit to a not for profit delivery system for the new national child care program.

As a matter of fact, last week I asked him if he was not afraid of the advent of big box child care if he continues down this road. I shared with him that all the research supports the fact that a not for

profit model gives us the best quality, which he insists is what will drive his child care program.

The minister says that his benchmark is quality, and he believes that whether the model is for profit or not for profit does not have any impact on quality. That is not what the research says. That is not what practical experience from around the world says either. He points to Quebec as a jurisdiction with both, but fails to recognize that in order for Quebec to have what it has, which is primarily not for profit, it put a moratorium on any public money going into for profit care for five years.

Therefore, if the issue for the minister is quality, he is obviously not looking at the research. Research from around the world and here at home shows that non-profits provide better quality care and are more accountable for the proper use of public money. A study done by the University of Toronto in December 2004 found that, with government subsidies accounted for, the quality of care in non-profit child care centres was about 10% higher than in for profit child care centres.

The same study also showed that the wages and education of employees were higher at not for profit child care centres. Higher wages and education among child care workers positively impacts care quality and helps maintain a workforce with experience.

In a field widely acknowledged as lacking room for profit, for profit centres cut operating costs in order to maintain profitability and competitiveness. Parents should not have to choose the amount of quality they can afford.

Two studies in Quebec both confirmed that quality is higher in not for profit delivery. It happened in home care in Ontario and it will happen in child care unless the McGuinty Liberal government closes the floodgates now.

If we build it, they will come. Let us build it right and invite the kind of providers we really need, those providing quality, non-profit, community based care. Let us stop the advent of big box day care in Canada.

• (1830)

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Social Development (Social Economy), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to elaborate on an important issue raised by my hon. colleague, the member for Sault Ste. Marie, concerning agreements in principle reached with provinces and territories for early learning and child care.

Just recently, the Minister of Social Development signed agreements in principle with his counterparts in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, as the hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie mentioned, as well as Ontario, Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia, to support the development of quality early learning and child care in these provinces.

Adjournment Proceedings

These agreements represent a clear commitment on the part of governments to build something significant, to build a system of early learning and child care in each province that children and their families can benefit from. We are using these agreements as models and we are hopeful that we can reach agreements with all provinces and territories in the days and weeks ahead.

[*Translation*]

As my colleague can see, every agreement in principle reflects our common commitment to a national vision and national principles and objectives for early childhood learning and child care. The agreements also incorporate the priorities and specific objectives of each province and territory. This will allow them to design and deliver programs and services that best respond to the needs and circumstances of the children, an area that comes under their jurisdiction.

[*English*]

Manitoba and Saskatchewan have longstanding policies of promoting non-profit child care and this is reflected in their agreements in principle, but provincial and territorial governments all have different systems and different priorities. As my hon. colleague knows, many of them rely on a mix of profit and non-profit regulated services. Under the agreements in principle we are putting in place, they will retain the flexibility to invest as they see fit to enhance early learning and child care in their jurisdictions.

However, if I may step back for a moment, I believe it is important that I quickly review what is meant by non-profit and profit child care in order to clarify this issue.

Non-profit early learning and child care services are incorporated under provincial or territorial legislation. Like other organizations in the social economy, they either generate no surplus or invest any surplus funds back into the program. Public child care services operated by municipal or provincial governments, hospitals or educational institutions are generally considered to be part of the non-profit sector.

For profit early learning and child care services can include child care centres and regulated home child care agencies. Child care services can be operated by an individual, a partnership or a corporation incorporated under provincial or territorial legislation.

As I have mentioned, right now Canada's mix of supports and services for early learning and child care includes both non-profit and for profit.

[*Translation*]

The non-profit sector made up 77% of all child care places in Canada in 2001, the last year for which national data are available. The highest proportion of for profit child care services was in Newfoundland with 64% and Alberta with 56%.

Government funding policies on for profit child care services vary from one province and territory to the next. Some provinces, such as Manitoba and Saskatchewan, limit funding to the non-profit sector and the percentage of child care spots in the for profit sector is very low at 8% and 1% respectively.

Other provinces, such as Newfoundland and Labrador and Alberta also fund both sectors and a relatively high proportion of child care places is provided by the for profit sectors.

[*English*]

Working together with our provincial and territorial partners, the government is confident that we can ensure its investments provide high quality—and those are the key words—early learning and child care programs and services that meet the needs of children and their families across Canada.

Mr. Tony Martin: Mr. Speaker, I am concerned because I did not hear a commitment to not for profit. As I know and as anybody who has looked at this file knows, if we do not commit to not for profit we are inviting big box corporate child care to come into Canada and take over. I know that the minister himself is concerned and I know that there are provincial ministers who are concerned.

As a matter of fact, in the first two agreements with Manitoba and Saskatchewan they insisted that there be a very definite commitment in writing to the not for profit, because they know, as do many others, particularly the communities that have been waiting for this national child care program for so long, that if we open it up to the for profit sector, we invariably will get the big box corporate interests coming into Canada and scooping up the public money that is now being flowed to actually put in place much needed child care spaces across this country.

What is the minister going to do to satisfy us or to give us comfort that if the government continues down this road of allowing the for profit model to play a role we will not in fact end up with big box child care—

• (1835)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos: Mr. Speaker, I think I mentioned in my remarks that a lot of it is under provincial jurisdiction. I think I was clear in my remarks, and I would like to reassure the member, as I want to reassure the members in this House.

[*Translation*]

We have to ensure that families across the country have access to high quality early childhood learning and child care programs that can help them put their children on the path to success later at school and in life.

That is why quality and development are two of the leading principles of the initiative.

[*English*]

We are working together with our provincial and territorial colleagues. The government is very confident that it can ensure its investments support high quality early learning and child care programs, that these services meet the needs of the children and their families and that there is a partnership between our provincial and territorial colleagues and the federal government.

Adjournment Proceedings

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 human resources development, social development, 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]

CONTENTS

Tuesday, May 31, 2005

<p>Commissioner of Official Languages</p> <p>The Deputy Speaker..... 6371</p> <p style="text-align: center;">ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS</p> <p>Canada Foundation for Sustainable Development Technology</p> <p>Mr. Bagnell..... 6371</p> <p>Committees of the House</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Foreign Affairs and International Trade</p> <p>Mr. Patry..... 6371</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Health</p> <p>Ms. Brown (Oakville)..... 6371</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Government Operations and Estimates</p> <p>Mr. Szabo..... 6371</p> <p>Petitions</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Foreign Affairs</p> <p>Mr. Bains..... 6371</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Marriage</p> <p>Mr. Szabo..... 6371</p> <p>Questions on the Order Paper</p> <p>Mr. LeBlanc..... 6372</p> <p style="text-align: center;">GOVERNMENT ORDERS</p> <p>Supply</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Opposition Motion—Gomery Commission</p> <p>Mr. Lunn..... 6372</p> <p>Motion..... 6372</p> <p>Mr. Szabo..... 6374</p> <p>Mr. Ritz..... 6374</p> <p>Mr. Szabo..... 6376</p> <p style="text-align: center;">ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS</p> <p>Committees of the House</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development</p> <p>Mr. LeBlanc..... 6376</p> <p>Motion..... 6376</p> <p>(Motion agreed to)..... 6377</p> <p>Divisions deemed demanded and deferred..... 6377</p> <p style="text-align: center;">GOVERNMENT ORDERS</p> <p>Supply</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Opposition Motion—Gomery Commission</p> <p>Motion..... 6377</p> <p>Mr. Stoffer..... 6377</p> <p>Mr. Brison..... 6377</p> <p>Mr. Fitzpatrick..... 6379</p> <p>Mr. Lunn..... 6380</p> <p>Mr. Forseth..... 6381</p> <p>Business of Supply</p> <p>Mr. LeBlanc..... 6381</p>	<p>Motion..... 6381</p> <p>Motion..... 6381</p> <p>(Motion agreed to)..... 6381</p> <p>Supply</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Opposition Motion—Gomery Commission</p> <p>Motion..... 6381</p> <p>Mr. Guimond..... 6381</p> <p>Mr. LeBlanc..... 6383</p> <p>Mr. Szabo..... 6384</p> <p>Mr. Comartin..... 6384</p> <p>Mrs. Ablonczy..... 6387</p> <p>Mr. Szabo..... 6387</p> <p>Mrs. Ablonczy..... 6388</p> <p>Ms. Crowder..... 6389</p> <p>Mr. Poilievre..... 6389</p> <p>Mr. Allison..... 6390</p> <p>Mr. Lastewka..... 6391</p> <p>Mr. Poilievre..... 6392</p> <p>Mr. Cotler..... 6392</p> <p>Mr. Gouk..... 6394</p> <p>Mr. Fitzpatrick..... 6395</p> <p>Mr. Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)..... 6396</p> <p>Mr. Prentice..... 6396</p> <p>Mr. Szabo..... 6397</p> <p>Mr. Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)..... 6398</p> <p>Ms. Ambrose..... 6398</p> <p>Mr. Szabo..... 6400</p> <p>Mr. Lastewka..... 6400</p> <p>Ms. Picard..... 6401</p> <p style="text-align: center;">STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS</p> <p>Peterborough Memorial Centre</p> <p>Mr. Adams..... 6402</p> <p>Canada Post</p> <p>Ms. Finley..... 6402</p> <p>Memorial Cup Hockey Tournament</p> <p>Mr. O'Brien..... 6403</p> <p>Guy Tardif</p> <p>Mr. Bergeron..... 6403</p> <p>Canada-Ukraine Internship Program</p> <p>Ms. Ratansi..... 6403</p> <p>Junior Hockey Program</p> <p>Mr. Fitzpatrick..... 6403</p> <p>Canadian Building Trades Council</p> <p>Mr. Powers..... 6404</p> <p>Centre d'action bénévole Les p'tits bonheurs</p> <p>Mrs. Lavallée..... 6404</p> <p>B. Fernand Nadeau</p> <p>Mr. D'Amours..... 6404</p>
--	--

Martin Donald Jones	
Mr. Goldring	6404
The Budget	
Mr. Bains	6404
National Day Against Homophobia	
Ms. Davies	6405
Justice	
Mr. Hiebert	6405
The Budget	
Mr. Côté	6405
New Democratic Party	
Mr. Duncan	6405
Child Care	
Mr. McGuinty	6405

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Member for Newton—Delta North	
Mr. Harper	6406
Mr. Martin (LaSalle—Émard)	6406
Mr. Harper	6406
Mr. Martin (LaSalle—Émard)	6406
Mr. Harper	6406
Mr. Martin (LaSalle—Émard)	6406
Sponsorship Program	
Mr. MacKay	6406
Mr. Brison	6406
Mr. MacKay	6407
Mr. Brison	6407
Member for Newton—North Delta	
Mr. Duceppe	6407
Mr. Martin (LaSalle—Émard)	6407
Mr. Duceppe	6407
Mr. Martin (LaSalle—Émard)	6407
Mr. Guimond	6407
Mr. Valeri	6407
Mr. Guimond	6407
Mr. Valeri	6408
Mr. Layton	6408
Mr. Martin (LaSalle—Émard)	6408
Mr. Layton	6408
Mr. Martin (LaSalle—Émard)	6408
Sponsorship Program	
Mrs. Ablonczy	6408
Mr. Brison	6408
Mrs. Ablonczy	6408
Mr. Brison	6408
Mr. Jaffer	6408
Mr. Brison	6408
Mr. Jaffer	6409
Mr. Brison	6409
Prime Minister	
Mr. Gauthier	6409
Mr. Valeri	6409

Mr. Gauthier	6409
Mr. Valeri	6409
Employment Insurance	
Mr. Lessard	6409
Ms. Stronach	6409
Mr. Lessard	6409
Ms. Stronach	6410
Health	
Mr. Fletcher	6410
Ms. Bennett	6410
Mr. Fletcher	6410
Mr. Dosanjh	6410
Aboriginal Affairs	
Mr. Prentice	6410
Ms. McLellan	6410
Mr. Prentice	6410
Ms. McLellan	6410
The Environment	
Mr. Smith (Pontiac)	6410
Mr. Dion	6411
Canada-U.S. Border	
Mr. Masse	6411
Mr. Lapierre (Outremont)	6411
Democratic Reform	
Mr. Broadbent	6411
Mr. Boudria	6411
National Defence	
Mr. MacKenzie	6411
Mr. Graham (Toronto Centre)	6411
Mr. MacKenzie	6411
Mr. Graham (Toronto Centre)	6411
Employment	
Mr. Van Loan	6412
Ms. Stronach	6412
Mr. Van Loan	6412
Ms. Stronach	6412
Child Care	
Ms. Gagnon (Québec)	6412
Mr. Dryden	6412
Infrastructure	
Mr. Laframboise	6412
Mr. Godfrey	6412
Correctional Service of Canada	
Mrs. Yelich	6412
Ms. McLellan	6412
Mrs. Yelich	6413
Ms. McLellan	6413
National Defence	
Mr. O'Brien	6413
Mr. Graham (Toronto Centre)	6413
Foreign Affairs	
Mr. Goldring	6413
Mr. Pettigrew	6413

Mr. Goldring	6413
Mr. Pettigrew	6413
Furniture Industry	
Mr. Bellavance	6413
Mr. Saada	6413
Foreign Affairs	
Mr. Silva	6414
Mr. Pettigrew	6414
Presence in Gallery	
The Speaker	6414
Privilege	
Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs	
Mr. Reid	6414
Mr. Broadbent	6414
Mr. Hill	6414
Ms. Davies	6415
Blocking of Members' Telephone Lines	
Mr. Boudria	6415
Mr. Marceau	6416
Mr. Kenney	6416
Mr. Gouk	6417
Mr. Goodyear	6417
Mr. Fitzpatrick	6418

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Supply	
Opposition Motion—Gomery Commission	
Mr. Sauvageau	6418
Mr. MacKay	6419
Mr. MacKay	6420
Mr. Murphy	6422
Mr. Tweed	6422
Mr. Fletcher	6424
Mr. MacKay	6424
Mr. Murphy	6424
Mr. MacKay	6426
Mr. Obhrai	6427
Mr. Lee	6427

Business of the House	
Mrs. Redman	6427

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Committees of the House	
Finance	
Mrs. Redman	6428
Motion	6428
(Motion agreed to)	6428

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Supply	
Opposition Motion—Gomery Commission	
Motion	6428
Mr. Obhrai	6428
Mr. Lastewka	6429
Mr. Day	6429
Division on Motion deferred	6430

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Income Tax Act	
Ms. St-Hilaire	6431
Bill C-306. Second reading	6431
Mr. Bigras	6432
Mr. Pacetti	6433
Mr. Mills	6434
Mrs. Desjarlais	6435
Mr. Bouchard	6437
Mr. McKay	6438

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

Iran	
Mr. Day	6438
Mr. McTeague	6439
Social Development	
Mr. Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)	6440
Ms. Bakopanos	6440

MAIL  POSTE

Canada Post Corporation / Société canadienne des postes

Postage paid

Port payé

Lettermail

Poste-lettre

**1782711
Ottawa**

If undelivered, return COVER ONLY to:
Publishing and Depository Services
PWGSC, Ottawa, ON K1A 0S5
Internet: <http://publications.gc.ca>
1-800-635-7943 or Local 613-941-5995

*En cas de non-livraison,
retourner cette COUVERTURE SEULEMENT à :*
Les Éditions et Services de dépôt
TPSGC, Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0S5
Internet: <http://publications.gc.ca>
1-800-635-7943 ou appel local (613) 941-5995

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

Also available on the Parliamentary Internet Parlementaire at the following address:

Aussi disponible sur le réseau électronique « Parliamentary Internet Parlementaire » à l'adresse suivante :
<http://www.parl.gc.ca>

The Speaker of the House hereby grants permission to reproduce this document, in whole or in part, for use in schools and for other purposes such as private study, research, criticism, review or newspaper summary. Any commercial or other use or reproduction of this publication requires the express prior written authorization of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Additional copies may be obtained from Publishing and Depository Services, PWGSC, Ottawa, ON K1A 0S5

Le Président de la Chambre des communes accorde, par la présente, l'autorisation de reproduire la totalité ou une partie de ce document à des fins éducatives et à des fins d'étude privée, de recherche, de critique, de compte rendu ou en vue d'en préparer un résumé de journal. Toute reproduction de ce document à des fins commerciales ou autres nécessite l'obtention au préalable d'une autorisation écrite du Président.

On peut obtenir des copies supplémentaires en écrivant à : Les Éditions et Services de dépôt, TPSGC, Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0S5

**On peut obtenir la version française de cette publication en écrivant à : Les Éditions et Services de dépôt
TPSGC, Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0S5**



CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 140 • NUMBER 105 • 1st SESSION • 38th PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, May 31, 2005
(Part B)

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

CONTENTS

(Table of Contents appears at back of this issue.)

All parliamentary publications are available on the
"Parliamentary Internet Parlementaire" at the following address:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca>

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, May 31, 2005

[Continuation of proceedings from Part A]

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1840)

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT (SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT) — MAIN ESTIMATES 2005-06

(House in committee of the whole for consideration of all votes under Human Resources Development (Social Development) in the Main Estimates, Mr. Strahl in the chair.)

The Chair: I would like to open this committee of the whole session by making a short statement on this evening's proceedings.

Tonight's debate is the second 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.

The debate is also held under the motions adopted by unanimous consent yesterday and earlier today.

Tonight's debate is a general one on all of the votes under Human Resources Development (Social Development). Each member will be allocated 15 minutes. 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.

[English]

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. The Chair would appreciate it if the first member speaking in each slot would indicate how the time will be used, particularly if it is to be shared.

When time is to be used for questions and answers, the Chair will expect that the minister's response will reflect approximately the time taken by the question since this time will be counted in the time originally allotted 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 remind hon. members that, according to yesterday's motion, during this evening's debate, no quorum calls, dilatory motions or requests for unanimous consent shall be entertained.

[English]

As your Chair, I will be guided by the rules of the committee of the whole and by the motions adopted yesterday and earlier today. However, in the interest of a full exchange I am prepared to exercise discretion and flexibility in the application of these rules.

It is very important that the traditions of this House in relation to decorum be respected and that members make their remarks and pose their questions in a judicious fashion. The Chair will expect all hon. members to focus on the subject matter of the debate: the main estimates of the Department of Human Resources Development, social development.

[Translation]

I would also I also wish to indicate that, 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.

At the conclusion of tonight's debate, the committee will rise, the estimates under Human Resources Development (Social Development) will be deemed reported and the House will adjourn immediately until tomorrow.

[English]

We may now begin tonight's session. The House in committee of the whole, pursuant to Standing Order 81(4)(a), the second appointed day, consideration in committee of the whole of all votes under human resources development, social development, in the main estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2006.

Mrs. Carol Skelton (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Mr. Chair, I would like to thank the minister and the deputy ministers for being here this evening.

I will be splitting my time with my hon. colleague from Simcoe—Grey in this first round.

On December 10 in this House the minister said:

Business of Supply

Mr. Speaker, the way in which Canadians look at important programs like education, health care and child care is that those are things that should be available to all Canadians...That is why we are going ahead the way we are going ahead.

It is clear that we are getting two tier day care here. The Liberal program will not be available to all Canadians. The Liberal program will have winners and losers. Why can parents not have a fair financial choice when it comes to choosing how to raise their children?

Hon. Ken Dryden (Minister of Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Chair, what I said in December had to do with the goal of a national early learning and child care system to be something that is as available and as ambitious as the other systems we have created in this country in terms of health care and education.

In terms of two tier, I do not understand that comment at all. This is a program that is there and available for everyone who wants to choose it. As I will say later in my remarks, it is also a program that is not all or nothing. Parents can choose to use it not necessarily eight hours a day, five days a week, but for mornings or afternoons or a lesser period of time as well.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: Mr. Chair, parents want choice in how they care for their children. Unfortunately, parents in rural areas have less choice than those in urban areas. When I say two tier, I mean that there are parents who are not going to be able to access the program the way the minister is talking about. Therefore, the minister is favouring urban families, because many rural communities cannot sustain formal child care centres. In many cases it is flexible, seasonal child care that rural families require, not regular nine to five workday care.

Why will the minister not allow the creation of a truly national program that treats children everywhere equally within a framework based on flexible parental choice and family needs?

• (1845)

Hon. Ken Dryden: Mr. Chair, first of all the delivery of this system is through the provinces and through the territories. It is up to them to try to find the answers in terms of delivery everywhere. The purpose is that the delivery is everywhere.

One of the great flexibilities of early learning and child care is the fact that the scale is small. The scale can be two, four, five, or eight places. It does not require a massive infrastructure or a massive number of kids in order for it to happen. It would be very much like rural education would have started in the country. One finds the space where something can be created in the space.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: Mr. Chair, the Conservative Party of Canada at its recent policy convention in Montreal passed a resolution calling for the creation of a national disabilities act similar to those in other developed countries.

When I asked the minister in committee if the Liberal Party shared our priority and concern for Canada's disabled, he was noncommittal. Now that he has had time to consider the benefits of such an act, would he be willing to work with the Conservative Party to bring forward such a piece of legislation?

Hon. Ken Dryden: Mr. Chair, as I said in the committee, and I was not noncommittal, I said that an act has been enacted in the United States and that it was something I was very interested in finding out more about. In fact I asked the committee specifically if

the committee itself would be interested in investigating more fully a potential national disabilities act.

Ms. Helena Guergis (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Mr. Chair, my questions have to do with our proposed day care program. Why does the minister have no confidence in Canadian parents to raise their own children and to make responsible child care choices that suit the needs of their particular circumstances? Why does the minister support a one size fits all child care regime that takes away a parent's right to choose?

Hon. Ken Dryden: Mr. Chair, on the contrary, I know, hon. members know and the public knows that the central developmental relationship of children is with their parents. Early learning and child care is another tool the parents have to assist them in raising their children, to use or to not use, to use as much or as little as they wish. It is not a one size fits all at all. That is what we were talking about earlier. There are different circumstances, different sizes of places and different needs, but the same ambitions and goals because there are kids that have the same possibilities.

Ms. Helena Guergis: Mr. Chair, Laurie from my riding e-mailed me to say that she was very confused. Prior to announcing the budget, it was her understanding and many of her friends' understanding that the majority of families were asking for the tax system to be made more fair so that families and parents who want to stay at home to raise their kids can do so rather than putting their tax dollars into institutions.

She personally had made some changes over five years ago to move into my riding of Simcoe—Grey but because taxes, utilities and the cost of living were so high, she was not able to continue to stay at home and is now back working again.

Mr. Chair, I want to ask the minister why he is so insensitive and unresponsive to the needs of Canada's young families. There are many Canadian families who would choose to have a parent remain in the home and care for their children. However, the government is completely oblivious to their needs and is setting up a program which these parents must fund through their tax dollars but can never take advantage of. Can the minister please explain why his program discriminates against so many hard-working Canadian families such as Laurie's in my riding of Simcoe—Grey?

• (1850)

Hon. Ken Dryden: Mr. Chair, the early learning and child care system that we are looking to encourage and help create is something that is available to anyone, as an education system would be and as a health care system would be. One could decide to use it more or less as in health and education.

As the hon. member knows, the great majority of young families in this country, like Laurie's, both parents are in the workplace. That is a fact. That is the reality. It is almost assuredly going to be tomorrow's reality. The other reality is the challenge of children growing up with the best possible opportunities at learning and development.

Business of Supply

Ms. Helena Guergis: Mr. Chair, I note that the minister is talking about what is fact; there are more working two income families and we see that increasing dramatically. However, he is failing to recognize that the reason is that Canadians are being overtaxed.

We do not continue to overtax them and then build institutions where not everyone has access to put their children into child care. In my riding of Simcoe—Grey they are not going to be able to access institutionalized day care. It is just not going to be a reality for them.

I belong to a party that respects a parent's right to choose. We support parents who choose formal child care arrangements. We support those parents who actually have unique child care needs. We also support those parents who choose to stay at home and care for their children.

Why does the minister not believe in equality for all Canadian families? Why does he continue to mislead Canadians in thinking that everyone is going to have an opportunity when it is just not reality?

Hon. Ken Dryden: Mr. Chair, on the contrary, the only thing that is misleading that has been said tonight is the fact that this is a system that is not available to everyone. It is available to everyone. It is up to people to make that choice as to whether they want to take part in it or not. The great majority of families have chosen to have their kids in some form of care. The challenge for us is to improve that form of care to make it that much better and that much more affordable.

Ms. Helena Guergis: Mr. Chair, I still think that the minister does not understand that the reason there are so many more two income families and why two parents have to work is that we are overtaxing Canadians. We cannot continue to overtax Canadians at the level that we do and then expect to start paying for a child care system that not all Canadians can access.

Look at the billions of dollars of surplus we have in the country and try to tell Canadians that they are getting a better bang for their buck. They are not. Introducing this program is just going to reinforce that message.

I really think that the Liberal Party and the government need to understand that they are really failing on this communication strategy because it is not working for them.

Constituents like mine will never ever be able to access it. It will never be up in Simcoe—Grey. It will only be in the big city centres.

I challenge him to explain this to my constituents and show them how they will have access.

Hon. Tony Ianno (Minister of State (Families and Caregivers), Lib.): Mr. Chair, I would like to respond to the hon. member. Unfortunately before she became a federal member eight or nine months ago, and I guess a while before that, the hon. member was with the provincial Tory government that made tremendous tax cuts. Yet poor Laurie and her family still had the problems.

Imagine tax cuts alone if they were the solution. We would have all the problems solved. We would not be discussing that issue.

What we have is an opportunity to create an early learning child care system that yes, is only the beginning but will allow young

children and their families to have the opportunities that many other families in our country have if they have money.

This is a great opportunity for the future of extending the system at the provincial level depending on the regions and what they institute.

● (1855)

Ms. Helena Guergis: Mr. Chair, what the minister of state has ignored in his response is that there is not a province across the nation that is not crying for the dollars to be returned to it rather than the surplus that the federal government has right now.

Yes, having worked for the provincial Conservatives in Ontario, we cut a lot of taxes. With that we increased job creation and job growth and we increased tax revenue. We were able to increase spending in certain areas, even though the federal Liberals had decreased dramatically the money going into the provinces, which I point out is evident in the billions of dollars of surplus that we have had since 1997.

Hon. Tony Ianno: Mr. Chair, taking into account that when the Mike Harris government in 1995 went in and from that point on there are three million more jobs in this country, 25% more Canadians are working today. It is because of good economic policies, but we also have a social conscience which is unlike the other party. We believe that Canadians have the opportunity. We have created opportunities from a good fiscal policy to ensure that all Canadians and children especially have all the opportunities for a good education to fulfill their dreams and our country's dreams.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: Mr. Chair, I would like the minister to tell me his vision of a rural child care or day care centre, for northern Saskatchewan, let us say. What is his vision for that?

Hon. Ken Dryden: Mr. Chair, first of all, it is up to the province of Saskatchewan to decide exactly what it would look like in a small town. The member would know small towns very well. Small towns have neighbours, people who provide assistance for children within that small town. The small town might be bigger than that and able to have a space that is that much larger.

The challenge of the provincial government is to try to meet the needs of all of its children within that province. Bigger scale or smaller scale, there are still people who live in that smaller place. There are still kids who live in that smaller place. There are still the possibilities of the provision of early learning and child care in that smaller place.

Hon. Ken Dryden (Minister of Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Chair, as Canadians, we have certain understandings about what it is to be Canadian, what we expect of ourselves and for ourselves, what we expect of and for others. As Canadians we expect a chance and a second chance. We expect the opportunity of a full, rich, rewarding life. For some this does not happen easily, because of illness or accident, disability, poverty, age, because of personal or family circumstances, because of something that puts us behind when the race begins or somewhere along its way.

Business of Supply

At Social Development Canada it is our job to see the gaps between those understandings and what is and with others to do something about it.

For me, our social policy rests on two main goals, ensuring the social well-being and the income security of Canadians. No single department, level of government or set of policies can do the job by itself. This is the reason that successful social policies and programs in our country have been achieved when the federal government has worked with the provinces and territories, worked with communities and worked with individual Canadians.

We simply have to work together to achieve anything big and worthwhile and successful. This partnership must recognize that Canadians want to be part of the decisions that affect them, that governments need to build on federal, provincial, territorial collaboration, that governments need to remain accountable to Canadians and need to enlist third parties to monitor social progress, and that research, knowledge and information are essential. Further, partnerships only work if they are founded in values and what Canadians stand for: shared community, equality and justice, respect for diversity, and a balance between rights and responsibilities.

Social Development Canada was created just 18 months ago, inheriting from other departments a set of policies, programs and services for seniors, persons with disabilities, children, families and caregivers, and communities, and inheriting all the values and motivations that set them in motion. SDC's purpose is to build upon all this to ensure income security and social well-being that strengthen Canada's social foundations and social cohesion.

[*Translation*]

In planning for the future, we need to take into account that we are living longer, healthier lives. We are living longer as seniors. We will live almost one-quarter of our lives after retirement, after our families are grown.

Being a senior can be a great physical, financial and psychological vulnerability; it can also be a time of great opportunity.

It is up to SDC to help seniors make the most of their lives. It is up to SDC to ensure that their public pensions are enough to underpin the basics of a life, and to ensure that those pensions will be there, next year, ten years, fifty years from now, when they and when we need them.

• (1900)

[*English*]

Several years ago the federal and provincial governments, as joint stewards of the Canada pension plan, agreed to significant reforms to ensure its long term financial sustainability. As a result, the Chief Actuary of Canada has stated that the CPP is financially sound for the next 75 years. Moreover, poverty rates for seniors have fallen from 21% in 1980 to 6.9% in 2002.

To put all this in perspective, according to the OECD, Canada's retirement income system, a mixture of public and private funds, is considered one of the best in the world in terms of equity, level of benefits and affordability.

However quality of life for seniors is not just measured in terms of income support. It lies in the purpose of every day. A program like New Horizons for seniors helps those who have reached their second life to share their skills, their experience and wisdom with others to make their communities better and in the process to make their own lives better as well.

Another area of concern for SDC is people with disabilities. Once people with disabilities were kept out of sight. Their disability defined them and was allowed to define them too often even in their own minds.

More than 20 years ago, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms reinforced our understanding of equality. It reinforced as Canadians our sensitivities to discrimination. Now people with disabilities want to live and insist on living fully and completely at school, at work, at play, in their moment to moment lives.

The Government of Canada has taken significant steps over the years, particularly in the areas of employment, income and taxation, to help persons with disabilities overcome many barriers to inclusion.

SDC brings together the Government of Canada's significant income support program, the CPP disability, with other programs and services offered by the Office of Disability Issues to promote the full inclusion of persons with disabilities in all aspects of learning, work and community.

We know that we need to do more but we also know that we cannot do it alone. People in communities are finding innovative new ways to tackle old problems. At SDC we help. One such innovation is through the social economy, community based social enterprises that are entrepreneurial but not for profit.

While many Canadian communities have successfully identified their own unique approach to helping their residents, others are finding it more difficult. By doing research into what works and in sharing these strategies with other communities, SDC is working to help community based efforts that improve the lives of Canadians. Members will hear more about this later in the debate from my parliamentary secretary.

Over 2.8 million Canadians provide care to seniors, to adults and to children with disabilities, and to Canadians with acute and long term health problems. For some the demands are overwhelming. The Government of Canada recognizes that unpaid family caregivers need help and support. In fact, we think it is such an important concern that we have a Minister of State responsible for Families and Caregivers.

SDC is working with the provinces and territories and has asked Canadians for their views on developing a comprehensive caregiver strategy. Again members will hear more about this from the Minister of State for Families and Caregivers later in the debate.

Business of Supply

•(1905)

[Translation]

In all our planning for the years to come, Social Development Canada has a strong commitment to ensure that all Canadian children have the opportunity to get a good start in life. The well-being of Canadian children is a key component of our country's quality of life now and in the future.

We all know that the pressures on families have changed and will continue to change. As they always have and always will, parents still play a primary role in raising their children.

But no longer are the majority of Canadian families with young children supported by a single income. Seven out of ten women with children under the age of six are in the workforce. This is the reality.
[English]

Recognizing that a vibrant and productive society requires investment in our children, the Government of Canada has put in place a comprehensive set of policies and programs to assist parents as required and to support and enhance the range of families' choices and circumstances. They include \$10 billion a year by 2007 for the Canada child tax benefit and the national child benefit supplement that helped 3.5 million low income families with the cost of raising their children, the child rearing dropout in the Canada pension plan which allows parents to stop working temporarily to raise their children without having a reduced pension when they retire, and the tax measures to assist families cover the additional cost of their children with disabilities.

However we know that even these measures have not provided parents of young children with the full flexibility and choice that contemporary life requires. SDC therefore was given a mandate in last fall's Speech from the Throne to increase access to the kind of quality early learning and child care programs that can help families put their children on an even better life path. The budget then announced \$5 billion over five years to move us toward this goal.

Working together, the provinces, territories and the federal government have developed a shared vision for early learning and child care, and I have been working with each province and territory on bilateral agreements in principle that will move this vision from dream to reality. Five provinces have signed these agreements so far and we expect more to do so in the weeks and months ahead.

All of this said, there is not one provincial government, not one territorial government, not one municipal government nor one Canadian citizen who does not want to do better in all these areas. We at SDC want to do better too.

Canada is a federation. It is as a federation that we are able to best meet the circumstances and needs of the Canadian people. As Canadian citizens, with our families, our companies and our unions, we are able to meet most of our needs ourselves. When we cannot, we look for government to help. It does not matter that it is our federal government, our provincial or territorial government, or our municipal government. We do not notice, we do not care. We just need help and we expect it.

We are also a country of great disparities. At any one moment, even if as Canadians we may see some things, such as health care,

early learning and child care, post-secondary education, a healthy environment and vibrant cities and communities, as clear and critical priorities for all, some provinces and territories may be able to deliver on these and some may not. This is where the federal government plays such an important role.

In the area of social development, seniors and income security, people with disabilities, early learning and child care, and families and caregiving, there are never enough resources to do what we, the federal, provincial, territorial and municipal governments, want to do and what the public wants done. That means we absolutely must work together for good jurisdictional reasons and for better practical reasons. The public does not expect cooperation, it assumes it. It cannot imagine it cannot tolerate anything else, nor should it.

At Social Development Canada we respect jurisdictions. We also respect people's needs, hopes and possibilities. That is real federalism, living federalism. That is federalism that people understand. That is why this past week, at the meeting in Quebec City of federal, provincial and territorial ministers responsible for seniors, we agreed to work collaboratively and to meet every year rather than every 18 months as in the past.

That is why my department, working with the provinces and territories and the disability community is developing a 10 year plan of action to advance the full inclusion of persons with disabilities. That is why the five early learning and child care agreements we have signed so far are not the same and why the agreements we will sign in the weeks ahead with the other jurisdictions will also be unique.

The principles are the same, the expectations are the same and the ambitions are the same, but how each province and territory will deliver on these principles, expectations and ambitions will be different. We need to work with them. At the same time, all of us must place great emphasis on accountability, on what the public expects and demands of us. Simply, we must work together because the demands on any of us are too great.

Early learning and child care offers an example of federalism at its best. Where do we go next? As a department we will work to help build Canadians' faith in government. Citizens want to know that the programs they value will be secure and will adapt to their evolving circumstances. We will work with our provincial and territorial partners to develop flexible new approaches where they are needed.

Business of Supply

•(1910)

We will not attempt to do everything on our own. Canadians do not support an old style approach where governments identify problems and devise solutions without listening to them. Governments make better decisions if citizens are involved in their plans and members of Parliament need to be an important part of this.

We will never forget the understandings that we share as Canadians and never let others forget and work always to close the gap between where we are and where we expect ourselves to be.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Chair, before addressing more administrative aspects of funding for the new Department of Social Development, I would like to discuss a more structural matter.

The Bloc Québécois does not support the creation of the new Department of Social Development, because there is an unstated goal. With the creation of the department, the government is infringing on the provinces' areas of jurisdiction, in this case, social development.

We know that Quebec did not sign the social union framework agreement in 1999. The federal government's intent was clearly to pave the way for meddling in areas of provincial jurisdiction, especially social development.

I could suggest more ready sources of funding so we would not have to study the votes of the new department today. It involves first settling the whole question of the fiscal imbalance. The minister says he is very attuned to the problem. He may be. However, I do not think he is taking the right approach to meeting the expectations of the various provinces. Obviously, he has raised a very important question. The provinces have a variety of avenues and objectives, according to public pressure, which is expressed in different ways.

We all know that, when one of the institutions established in Quebec has a shortfall, people take to the streets. The big demonstrations are held in Quebec. They took place in connection with health and school funding.

I would invite the minister to examine the whole question of fiscal imbalance. The government has generated surpluses of \$70 billion and has \$140 billion in manoeuvring room to develop new initiatives, including a number in social development, probably.

The Minister of Social Development was saying that the government wants to be accountable to Canadians. What do they think the provinces want to do? Report to their people. With the threat of the fiscal imbalance, it is impossible to properly respond to expectations.

I would remind the minister of a comment by the National Council of Welfare. It pointed out that the government should not base its family policy on intervention programs, because these federal programs "add further complications to the tangle of fragmented programs and policies that are within the jurisdiction of the provincial and territorial governments." It is clear from the 1867 Constitution that social issues are a provincial matter.

Thanks to this new department, the minister will have all the latitude needed to interfere in areas of provincial jurisdiction. This minister envisions these programs being cost-shared equally. That was how it worked 25 years ago.

I think it is a matter of vision. Quebec does not think that this new department is interfering with regard to cost-shared programs; it is interfering with regard to Quebec's areas of jurisdiction. These are not areas of joint jurisdiction, contrary to what the Minister of Social Development thinks and says.

First, I want to ask him a few questions. Apparently, it will cost \$53 billion to administer this new Department of Social Development. About 97% of that will go to income security and the guaranteed income supplement, leaving about \$1.5 billion or \$2 billion for initiatives in areas under provincial jurisdiction. We know that there are different categories of objectives: inclusion and participation, dynamic communities, investing in children and families, service innovation. There are various programs under each of these different sectors of activity.

I want the minister to tell us whether, in addition to the \$53 billion and the \$1.2 billion set aside for these initiatives, additional funding will be provided.

•(1915)

It was not very clear when I looked at the budget. There are some blank spaces under the minister's new initiatives where we see, for example, the amounts for operations. However, there is still no funding set aside for children and families. There is no funding set aside for grants and contributions under the transfer payments. There are some blanks in the 2005-06 budget.

I am very concerned, because we were told that this department would not cost much and that its purpose was to increase efficiency and better respond to the different client groups. We were told that it would involve the transfer of public servants. Some 12,000 public servants have been transferred; almost 11,000 remain with Human Resources Canada.

So this is an attempt to increase efficiency and diligence with regard to all the target client groups. Many people are targeted: families, children and the handicapped. There are many client groups.

If 97% of \$1.5 billion, which appears to be the budget allocated, goes to the guaranteed income supplement and old age security, there is not a lot left over.

I foresee close to \$500 million for operating the various components of your department, so you are left with approximately \$1.2 billion. Do you think you can get any more? You have an ambitious project, to help natural caregivers. I see the minister is here, perhaps to help you answer all these questions.

Business of Supply

My assistants and I—they are not here this evening—have tried to understand the numerous blanks that have been left. There is, for instance, nothing to tell us how much you are going to inject into dynamic communities, or how much in grants and contributions will go to the transfer payments. There are some major gaps. The same thing goes for investing in children and families.

And where are you going to get the budget for child care? I will get back to that in my second question. We need to look at where your budget is going to come from. Do you have other new funding you are planning to announce in the coming months?

Do I now yield the floor to the minister? This is my first time in committee of the whole, I would like some answers.

• (1920)

[*English*]

Hon. Ken Dryden: Mr. Chair, I am not sure where to begin. There were a lot of comments and a lot of questions.

In terms of the early comments that were made and in talking about invasions and interventions, and all of the rest of it, all the hon. member had to do was to be in Winnipeg, Regina, Gander, Hamilton or in Halifax for those child care announcements. The public in the room did not feel intervened upon. Those ministers responsible did not feel intervened upon. Those premiers, and four out of the five premiers were there for those particular announcements, did not feel intervened upon.

As I said earlier in my remarks, we are talking about our understanding of what a federation is and what the role of a federal government is and can be. In those areas that are understood as big priorities, things that are of importance to Canadians, we must find a way of delivering what is needed to the public. In a lot of instances the provinces or territories are simply not in a position to deliver on that kind of priority at a particular time.

If anybody went back 12 or 13 months, there were no big changes projected over a five or ten year period in terms of early learning and child care. They were not going to happen largely because outside of the province of Quebec there were not any provinces or territories in the position to, or with the ambition and priority, give a big push to early learning and child care that would make that much of a difference.

That is why all of this and why those five announcements had the kind of reaction that they did. In terms of the main estimates for 2005-06 as compared to 2004-05, the main estimates for 2005-06 total \$29.4 billion which is a net increase of about \$945 million over the 2004-05 estimates.

The major changes are: an increase of \$953 million to the income security programs due to changes in the average rate of payments and in the population based on revised demographic data; an increase of \$39.3 million in voted grants and contributions mainly due to the budget 2004 items that were approved as part of the 2004-05 supplementary estimates; and an increase of \$19.4 million for payments to private collection agencies. This item was transferred to SDC which has responsibility for the management of collection activities.

There was a decrease of \$44.4 million related to the employee benefit plan contributions due to a decrease in salary costs and in salary rate for benefits passing from 21.5% to 20% and there was a decrease in \$21.6 million in operating expenditures resulting from the allocation to HRSD Canada of shared corporate services provided by SDC and from other technical adjustments.

I guess beyond that we could talk about what it is we do. Is there a question about early learning and child care?

• (1925)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: Mr. Chair, I had 15 minutes allotted to me to ask questions. We are partnered this evening, so do I give someone else the floor now or do I have a few minutes left for myself?

The Chair: You have only two minutes, that is all.

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: Mr. Chair, I know full well that the provinces have welcomed the child care system with joy, as the minister says. Nonetheless, in Quebec it is another story. We are not against the fact that this national child care system is being implemented in other regions. However, we have asked the Minister of Social Development whether a province that does not want to participate in the program, because it already has its own, can have the right to withdraw with full compensation. That is what it means to respect provincial jurisdictions. Nonetheless, the minister insists on negotiating with conditions.

I will not get into a debate over it. However, in the meantime, I want the minister to know that the \$5 billion he allocated to child care over five years may seem very generous, but let me remind him that since 1998, when the program was set up in Quebec, the federal government has saved \$1 billion in unclaimed tax deductions. Accordingly, if every province contributed to implementing a child care system, which costs the Government of Quebec \$2 billion, then perhaps the government could give more latitude in terms of the money that government will invest in child care.

I want to hear what the minister has to say about his willingness to respect provincial jurisdictions—

The Chair: The Minister of Social Development.

[*English*]

Hon. Ken Dryden: Mr. Chair, as has been said in the House before, in terms of understanding the role that the Government of Quebec has played in early learning and child care in this country, it is clearly the forerunner. It is clearly the model. I think of it more as the inspiration that was probably behind the commitment that was made in the last campaign.

Business of Supply

Entering into discussions with Quebec, all of that is understood. It is absolutely clear the amount of financial commitment that has been made by the Government of Quebec in early learning and child care, which is far more than anyone else has made. By acting earlier than other jurisdictions and acting in a more ambitious way, the Government of Quebec will not be penalized for that early and ambitious action.

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Chair, it is an honour and indeed a pleasure to have the opportunity to speak to the minister from this seat belonging to the Leader of the Opposition. I usually sit in the corner so I do not get the chance to go face to face with the minister when I ask him questions in the House on some of these really important issues.

I am pleased to be here tonight with my colleague from Winnipeg Centre who is very passionate, as are all New Democrats, about some of the programs for which the Minister for Social Development and his colleagues now have responsibility. These are program that support and help people live life to its fullest capacity. They help those in difficulty and those who want opportunity. They support people in their health care needs and support families and children in their education needs. The minister and his colleagues all have a great responsibility on their shoulders and we are here as New Democrats to work with them to achieve some goals on that score.

We are willing to stay this evening because we are concerned, interested and actually excited about the possibilities since the new NDP budget was passed at second reading in the House. I know from being in my own riding, as does my colleague from Winnipeg Centre who was in his riding last week, that people are very excited about this new budget, the new commitment to spending on programs that will support people and communities and make life better for everybody.

Just off the bat I want to suggest to the minister that he not, for even a nanosecond, think about replicating what Mike Harris did in Ontario from 1995 to 2003 because that was a devastating, damaging, destructive, heart ripping experience for the people in that province. I know because I was there. I served for eight years in opposition to that program. We could not do anything because it was a majority government and it kept changing the rules to make it easier for it to drive that agenda.

The story is now well-known across the country. All one has to do is mention the name Walkerton to understand that the Ministry of the Environment lacked the resources to put environmental inspectors in the field to ensure that kind of thing did not happen.

Everyone knows what happened in Ipperwash and how all of a sudden the attitude toward our first nations, in a very short period of time, changed dramatically from day to night.

Today the Ontario Liberal government is struggling big time to make ends meet and to find the resources to live up to the promises it made when it ran in the election of 2003. When it was elected it found out how difficult it was, as we knew it would because we were the government from 1990 to 1995 in some very difficult economic and challenging times. From 1995 to 2003 we had some of the best economic times in the country. However the government of the day under Mike Harris gave that money away. It gave tax break after tax break to corporations to the point where now there is no money left

in the coffers of the Ontario government to support people and communities and for education and health care.

Health care in every community across Ontario is in dire crisis. It is a crisis everywhere. We cannot get enough doctors. Hospitals are struggling to keep beds open. Emergency rooms are shutting down over the weekends. All kinds of things are happening, things that we never thought were possible in a jurisdiction as rich as the province of Ontario.

It happened because we had a government that made a choice to make a priority of corporate tax breaks, which we talked the Liberal government out of in this federal budget. We told it not to spend \$4.6 billion on yet another corporate tax break at the expense of investing in child care, in education, in the environment, of spending money in third world countries to take our role in the world as leaders and to do our part and at the expense of people who lose their jobs.

If this budget passes, we will have a fund to help workers who end up on the street because their companies went bankrupt and they did not have wage protection and therefore did not get paid. It will help seniors and retirees make ends meet.

● (1930)

Those are all the things that are now in the federal budget that the minister will have responsibility for putting in place. He will have that money. He will give leadership and as long as he continues to be the minister in the government he must make good on those promises.

Canadians are waiting in great expectation for the government to work to get the budget passed so we can make those investments in child care, in education, in the environment and in housing actually happen and we can see the results of that work.

I want to talk a bit tonight about child care. This is not something new. We have had these conversations before. I also want to talk about the clawback of the child tax benefits supplement. I have been appalled ever since it started, even as a member in the provincial legislature, that provinces would actually claw back money from the most at risk and vulnerable of our families, money that was given to them in the first place by the federal government to deal with the shamefully high child poverty that exists in this country.

I also want to talk a bit about a conversation we had at committee concerning social transfers. The reason we are having difficulty supporting the passage of Bill C-22 is that we would like to see the minister's department commit to a framework wrapped around that social transfer that speaks to some of the values the minister spoke to in his wonderful speech a few minutes ago and what he thought Canada should be about and how it should support its people and its communities.

We want to work with the minister to ensure there is a framework of accountability and transparency with that money so that when it flows to the provinces we will know and the provinces will know what it is for. In that way the federal and provincial governments can be held accountable for the expenditure of that money.

Business of Supply

I also would love to talk about an issue that was raised by the Conservatives, a Canadians with disability act. That is a wonderful idea and certainly the government would get 100% support from our caucus on anything it might do on that front.

I also want to talk about housing. I just had a meeting this past week in my riding on some of the wonderful programs that were put in place to deal with the tragic circumstance of homelessness, particularly in some of our bigger cities. Some programs that have been put in place are now starting to work but they need to be firmed up. There needs to be core funding and there needs to be some stability put into the system to help those people who are working so hard on our behalf to ensure that people who are without homes have some place to sleep at night and a place they can call home. They need to feel supported and need to feel that they do not have to spend 50% to 75% of their time fundraising. They should be able to put in the energy, excitement, enthusiasm and effort that they have for this agenda into looking after people who are living on our streets without a home.

All of these issues are very important. All of these issues have been addressed to some degree in the new budget that we passed at second reading two weeks ago and that we need to get through the House in short order.

I think everyone knows where we stand as New Democrats. We want a national child care program and are convinced that the only way to give parents choice in this country is to have a national child care program. If parents are going to have the choice to either stay home or go out to work, they need to know in either case that their children will be looked after in a safe place and with quality programs of a developmental nature that will support them in their growth and development. If we do not have a national child care program in every community in Canada, parents will not have choice. The only choice they will have is to stay home. I am not saying there is anything wrong with that choice. As a matter of fact, my wife and I made that as a family choice because we could afford it and we had no other choice at that point.

As the minister said earlier today, more parents are making that choice today. With the economy we have and the education and training that women in particular are now taking advantage of and knowing what they have to offer society, I think we need to ensure there is choice.

● (1935)

The argument I would make is that if parents in every community across the country are to have the choice of either staying home or going to work, we need an affordable, quality national child care program operating and funded. We believe in a national child care program that is based on the QUAD principles. I will list the things we do not agree on. We think it should be delivered through a not for profit delivery mechanism, and we need to talk about that. Actually, that is going to be my question, if the minister wants to think about it for a bit. What research does the minister have to back up his claim that we will have the same quality whether it is for profit or not for profit? If he focuses on quality, he will get quality.

The research we have is from people working in the child care community who have strongly suggested that if child care is not delivered through the not for profit system we will not get the

quality. It has been proven, not just in research but in practical experience around the world, that if we get into the for profit system, invariably the big box child care system starts raising its head and becomes the dominant player.

What happens is that those institutions begin to find savings for the bottom line by cutting wages, cutting back on the food budget or by making child care workers the janitors at night after they finish teaching. By not investing in the kind of equipment, toys and facilities that we need, that results in a poor quality child care setting.

We believe child care should be a not for profit system. We also believe the minister should be working with us on legislation at the federal level to ensure that the provinces will deliver a quality national child care program and that the money that flows will be spent. Ontario is another example. The federal government did flow child care money to Ontario over the last three or four years under agreements that were signed by first ministers on child care and not a penny of that money was ever spent.

The same thing occurred in B.C. As a matter of fact, B.C. pulled its own money out and said that it was replacing it with federal money. In fact, the federal money was less than the money that was taken out of B.C.

We think we need some mechanism at the federal level to ensure that the money that flows, which is a significant amount of money, particularly if we move toward 1% of GDP, will actually be used for child care and that the federal government will be there at the end of the five years still contributing and helping to grow that system so the provinces are not left holding the bag, so to speak, which has actually happened in previous experience, and the provinces are worried about that.

We need some legislation that would speak to that, speak to the not for profit, speak to quality and speak to the QUAD principles. I would like to work with the minister on that.

I am running out of time so I will pose my question. What research do you have to back up your decision to allow for profit or not for profit? In doing that, why are you so confident that you will get the quality that you think is possible?

● (1940)

The Chair: We are fairly casual tonight in one way but we try to encourage members to address comments through the Chair and not direct questions as to “What are you going to do” but direct questions as to “What is the minister going to do”, and so on.

We will give the minister one minute to answer that question and we will see how he does.

Business of Supply

Hon. Ken Dryden: Mr. Chair, in terms of research, the first point is that in every province and territory there is both not for profit and for profit. All of the western European countries, which, as we know, are much more mature systems, have both. The member is correct. Some of the research that has been done show some differences in the quality between not for profit and for profit and some of the research shows that the not for profits score better than for profits do.

One of things we will be doing very carefully in all of this is monitoring how we are doing. We have a \$100 million accountability package. There will be action plans and information that will be required of the provinces and territories. We will be watching very carefully to see how the provinces and territories do. We will be watching to see who does better and who does worse in terms of the mechanism of delivery.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I am pleased to have the opportunity to take part in the discussion this evening. I will be splitting my time with the Minister of State for Families and Caregivers and will have a question for him when I have had a chance to make a few comments. I truly do consider him to be a champion for some of the most vulnerable in our society.

I want to talk about an issue that is particularly important to me. It is the issue of voluntary caregiving. Caring for one another is a Canadian value. Across this country Canadians are caring for members of their families and for their friends and they are doing it more than they ever have before. For some people the responsibilities are manageable, but for some the demands are overwhelming.

Caregiving can be very intense for a long period of time. The personal and societal costs can be very high. There is a role for government to play in supporting unpaid family caregivers to help them meet their caring responsibilities to ensure that those who are receiving care have a high quality of life and that caregivers can provide support without significant risk to their own health and their own wealth.

Furthermore, by helping caregivers, governments are helping to relieve pressures on our formal health care system and our social services systems as well. Over 2.8 million Canadians are providing care to seniors, adults and children with disabilities and to Canadians with acute and long term health conditions.

Not all caregiving situations are the same. Caregiver situations are diverse depending on who they are, where they live, who they take care of, their level of income, their level of family support, their cultural background and a lot of different areas.

I want to talk about my own personal experience and put this in my own context. One of the most important experiences of my life was the period when my parents were dying and my family and my six brothers and sisters and I provided care so that they died at home. My father had stomach cancer and my mother had bowel cancer. From Christmas of 2002 until my mother's death on March 31 and my father's death on May 13, my two sisters, Shelagh and Brigid, gave up their jobs in Toronto and moved into the family home in Nova Scotia.

They were the primary caregivers to mom and dad. Led by them, we all provided care. We took turns. We came together as a family, quite often three times a day, to say prayers with them, to provide medication and to provide comfort and all the things that had to happen.

Of course it was a sad time for the family, but in many ways it was very rewarding as well. Not only did we grow in our faith, but we grew in our closeness as a family. There is not one of us who would be able to say that we were not enriched by the experience of being with our parents while they died after they had spent a lifetime giving to us. We never regretted being there. We never regretted the opportunity to give back to parents who gave so much to us.

But we had some real advantages in spite of this difficult time for our family. We were not a wealthy family, but we had enough financial resources. There were seven of us so we took turns, although my two sisters, Shelagh and Brigid, took the bulk of the load. We all took turns and that made it a lot easier.

It was a short period of time. I can vividly recall my father saying to me after my mother passed away, "I'm going to go into a hospital and be taken care of from the hospital and you kids are going to go on with your lives". He said that was what he wanted to do, but we knew he did not want to do that. We knew that deep down he was just being the stubborn old man that he always was. He wanted us to convince him that we wanted to take care of him, which we did. That is what happened. I remember the day he said to us that he would let us take care of him, but the only reason he would, he said, was that he knew he was not going to live very long because he wanted us to get on with our lives.

So we had resources and it was a short period of time, but we also had employers who understood our situation. Each and every one of had companies we worked for that understood the situation or partners who understood and allowed us the time we needed to make this situation happen. We also had a lot of support from people such as Jack McNeil, a dear friend of our family and a deacon in the Catholic church, who provided spiritual guidance.

Most people do not have those advantages. What was a sad but rewarding experience for us is a very stressful experience for many Canadians who do not have the level of income that they need to be able to take time off work and care for loved ones, be they adults, a spouse or a parent, or children who may be autistic or have other challenges. Those are very stressful times for Canadians and they are times when we as the Government of Canada need to support them.

● (1945)

It is difficult. There is no question about it. The demands placed on caregivers decrease their own capacity to provide quality care. If we as a government do not provide support it can negatively impact not only the quality of life of the people who are being cared for but that of the people who are providing care. Caregiving involves costs to caregivers, employers and society. Caregivers can lose income and have greater out of pocket expenses. There can be costs to employers to accommodate employees with caregiving opportunities.

Business of Supply

I want to talk a little about the minister. I have had a chance to spend a great deal of time with him. He has taken the time to come to Nova Scotia, as he has for other parts of Canada, and do round tables with caregivers, because they quite often tend to be the forgotten people in society.

In Nova Scotia, I became a little bit involved with Caregivers Nova Scotia because of my own experience and have had the opportunity to meet many other people whose burdens are almost unimaginable.

The minister was with me in Halifax last month as the guest speaker to Caregivers Nova Scotia. One of the people who was honoured that day was someone who I believe had a spouse who was dying of cancer and whose child was diagnosed as autistic and Down's syndrome. How do people cope with that? How do people who do not have a significant income cope with that kind of pressure and responsibility?

One reason why we all got into politics was to help those who need help, not those who do not. When people are doing something to support the people they love and at the same time are taking a huge burden off the system, what better cause could there be for a government to support than that?

I know that the minister has spent a lot of time on this. I appreciate it, as do people at Caregivers Nova Scotia and other people across the country. Perhaps he could talk a little about what the government is doing to help all the volunteer caregivers who give so much of their time and energy to help friends and family members.

● (1950)

Hon. Tony Ianno (Minister of State (Families and Caregivers), Lib.): Mr. Chair, first of all I would like to express my gratitude to and support for the hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour. We can see the compassion and the understanding of the issue that we face regarding caregivers, the unsung heroes of our society.

I have spoken to many in this House. I know that many have their own personal circumstances, which they have dealt with for a long time. Some are more fortunate than others. There are many who are not.

As a society and a government what we must do is work with all the stakeholders and all levels of government to find ways to help our aging population, the disabled and the families that care for them with willingness, with love and with compassion. We must ensure that we help those three million people who do this unpaid, who give of themselves and find economic opportunities to help their families, especially in certain circumstances, or when they age, and a spouse, a partner, a neighbour or a friend becomes affected and they are there for them, whether it is to help them shop for groceries, cut the lawn, take them to a doctor or do whatever they need.

Together with all levels of government we must find ways to help these people. Without them Canada would be in very dire straits, because all the money that we put into health care would not come close to what is required to give these people the kind of life we would want for our loved ones.

In this budget, the first step we took was to increase the medical expense tax credit from \$5,000 to \$10,000. It is a first step.

With the round table discussions that we had in Atlantic Canada, the prairie provinces and Ontario, and which we will be having in B. C., what we are hearing from all the stakeholders, all the persons who make up the society from a caregiving perspective, is a clear message that sometimes one person alone cannot do it. The message is that it is a responsibility as a society for all of us to share, to help and to be there, whether it is in an economic way, lending a helping hand or just lending an ear sometimes. I think we can do it. What we are finding with our round tables is that everyone has a different opinion depending on their circumstances. This is not one size fits all.

What happens on the first day someone is actually in a situation where a loved one needs attention? What do people do? These are the kinds of questions that we are asking of ourselves in trying to find out what the first step is. With our election platform of \$1 billion over five years, working with the provinces and with stakeholders, what is it that we can do to help fill the void, the vacuum, which will alleviate some of the first pressures that people face? Where do they turn?

As we all know, all levels of governments often work in silos. On day one, where does that person begin? As we work with everyone at our September national round table and as we ask this committee to actually consider as a priority where members can work with government, with us, what we are hoping to do is find a solution to some of the problems. We are not asking members to wait until we come here and give the answers. We are asking members to work together because there is no one answer.

I was hoping that the committee would be able to do some of that as we are travelling the country and meeting with all the stakeholders and the provincial ministers responsible. I believe that is a start. It is similar to the early childhood and child care program: we start somewhere.

● (1955)

Yes, there are tax measures to deal with the disabled, the 25 points that were put in the budget in terms of what the committee wanted. We are always moving the agenda forward because 40% of our seniors are disabled and people, regardless of their framework in life today, can be affected.

I was at a fundraiser, a Bay Street crowd for MS, and I was able to speak. I very briefly said to them that any of them could go home that night and face the difficulties of becoming a caregiver. It is important for all of us to work together, to reach out and to contribute in any way we can on an individual and collective way. Together we can solve some of the problems that are faced by caregivers.

We have an aging population and Canadians are living longer and healthier lives. However, they will also require government to be a part of that process.

Business of Supply

There are many issues that will in effect be important for the committee to look at to ensure that we will make a difference in lives of people. I am excited about this issue because it really is a non-partisan issue. I can speak to any member, as I have in the past. I know members care just as deeply as we do. I challenge them to put some energy into this so we can come up with some solutions as we travel the country to make a difference. Some members have personal experiences and know better than others on how to solve some of these problems.

Ms. Rona Ambrose (Edmonton—Spruce Grove, CPC): Mr. Chair, I will be sharing my time with the member for Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock.

I would like to thank the Minister of Social Development and the Minister of State for Families and Caregivers and their officials for being here tonight at such a late hour to answer our questions about issues that are of importance to all Canadians and very much make up the social fabric of our nation. I will speak specifically from my own viewpoint and that of my peer group. That is what I can do legitimately on this topic.

I would like to express my views on the policy. The minister of state referred to his area as being something he would like to see us treat as non-partisan. I truly believe that the issue of child care and choice in child care will have such a significant impact on not only my gender, but on my age group. I really want to share, frankly, with the Minister of Social Development where my peer group is coming from and what I am hearing from them, which is that this is not the sixties.

My peer group is professional, young, educated, urban women who have access to the workforce. We are competing very successfully in medical schools, in dentistry schools, in law schools and in all professional schools. We also are competing very successfully in the workplace. I would like to say that we compete successfully in the political arena as well.

However, we also want to have access and we want all of our choices treated equally, whether we choose, if we have children, to stay home or to work part time or to work full time and to have access to day care. We want all those choices. My peer group want the government to facilitate our choices, not restrict them.

One of the things I have noticed in the report on plans and priorities, and the Minister of Social Development referred to it, is that the Government of Canada plans to spend \$100 million for the development of a new accountability package that is supposed to support improved research and evidence based indicators. Could the Minister of Social Development share with the House if any of that money will go to either a gender based analysis of the child care program or an income based analysis, so my peer group and my gender can be assured that all women will be assisted by this program in an equitable fashion?

In my academic background, I have a lot of feminist theory training and gender based analysis training. My concern is this program discriminates against young women in the workplace who would like to either stay home part time or full time with their children. It discriminates against women in low income jobs who more often than not do shift work. It also discriminates against women who live in remote and rural areas.

Has the Minister of Social Development done a gender based analysis and could he share those results with me tonight?

• (2000)

Hon. Ken Dryden: Mr. Chair, in terms of the accountability package, the details of the strategy still need to be worked out with the provinces and the territories. However, there is a good basis for collaborative work in this area. For example, work is currently under way both by the FPT committee on early childhood development, knowledge, information and effective practices and the provincial-territorial directors of early childhood education and care.

In brief, we are still working out exactly those things that would be looked at and measured.

The hon. member talked about choice. Every program, every policy that one implements is a choice. There is no program that is not a choice. Health care does not deal with everything. Education does not deal with everything. Early learning and child care does not deal with everything. It was not intended to, it does not and it will not.

The question for all of us is, what will her party deliver in terms of choice? The only concrete information we have heard from her party was in the last campaign. It was a \$2,000 tax benefit. It would cost roughly \$2 billion to do that. The impact on child care would be minimal. That is a choice. She can make that choice. However, it is a choice as all these things are choices.

Ms. Rona Ambrose: Mr. Chair, it is the government's choice to implement a program that is restrictive and only offers one choice. However, what we have said on this side of the House is we want an equitable program. We support formal day care, but we also support informal day care, at home day care. We support a parent's right to stay home if he or she would like to part time. Real choice is about that. We want to know if the government will financially empower all choices and not just one.

Gender based discrimination is a serious issue. I hope the minister can make a commitment tonight to do a gender based analysis of the program with the \$100 million which he has committed. I think he will find out that some women will fall between the cracks, who will not have access. That takes me to another question about universality.

My concern is this program is not universal. The minister has made the commitment and has said that he respects universality. However, I do not understand how he can claim that a program is universal if it is not accessible to all. If he has committed to the QUAD principles, I want to know which of the QUAD principles is most important? Which ones will you commit to following through on and will you commit to a gender based analysis of this program?

Business of Supply

• (2005)

The Chair: Just a reminder again to members to please address their comments through the Chair and call the member by either by his riding name or in this case by the title. The Minister of Social Development.

Hon. Ken Dryden: Mr. Chair, to follow up my previous answer to the member, we do intend to develop a gender based analysis.

In terms of universality and what principles are the most important, one does not have QUAD principles and decide that the Q and the A are more important than the U and the D. One has QUAD principles. It is quality. It is universal inclusion. It is accessibility. It is developmental. All those things are part of an appropriate and ambitious system. That is what one would want in health care, in education and in early learning and child care. We need all those things to deliver on the others. We need quality in order to deliver a system. Nobody is particularly interested in a system that is entirely mediocre. Nobody is interested in a system that is not developmental or affordable or the rest of it. All those are parts of the same thing.

Mr. Barry Devolin (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Mr. Chair, I would like to continue with the same line of questioning. I have heard the minister say on many occasions that this is a program that will be universally accessible in a similar way to public education. If I can speak in the context of Ontario, which is my home province and that of the minister, we see now that the Ontario government is moving to focus its day care and early learning opportunities within the elementary school system. It is taking JK and SK and building day care into the schools.

I think the point of universality is that something can be theoretically available to everyone, which if it is run in a school, it is. However, people who choose not to use it still have to pay for it. Stay at home parents could choose not to use it. They are essentially bearing the cost twice, once through their taxes to pay for the program for everybody else and then they pay for it out of their own pocket through lost income if one of the two parents chooses to stay at home.

My fear is what we will have in Ontario is a program based in the school system which operates from 9 a.m. to 3 or 4 p.m. Monday to Friday, with summers off. In my riding, which is rural, I have many retail workers who work evenings, weekends and in the summer. I think for many people who are focused at least as much on the custodial child care and the cost of the custodial child care part of this equation, as they are to the early learning, they feel the system which we appear to be moving toward in Ontario will inherently discriminate against them.

It will work well for professionals who tend to work from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday to Friday, but it will not work well for shift workers or people who work irregular hours.

What seems to be in the process of being implemented in Ontario is not universal to everyone, is not accessible to everyone and ironically it will discriminate against many people who are in lower income levels because they work irregular hours. They feel that this system will not work for them. Not only will it not work for them, but they will end up paying for part of it through their taxes.

That is why we say that if the financial assistance flows through the parents and the parents have options to choose different choices, including full time professional care, then this would ensure that all parents would have access to some financial support for their child care costs.

I would appreciate it if the minister would comment on that.

Hon. Ken Dryden: Mr. Chair, the Ontario plan is a wrap around to kindergarten and junior kindergarten. It is not of the school system. In those instances its site is within the school, but it is not of the school.

In terms of school hours, as the member says of 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., those are not at all necessarily the hours of the early learning and child care service that is offered within the school.

As I have said to the member and to others before, this is a system that is evolving. It is difficult to know exactly who the central server will be.

The hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie worries about the big box stores. The member Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock is worried about the school system taking it over in a way that makes it less flexible for the particular needs.

We have to ensure, first, that it does not happen and second, specifically as it relates to Ontario. Again, it is sited within the school, but it is not organized as the school would be. I would suspect that to a great extent in the future the schools would be more and more involved in that way because they are at the centre of a community. They are there in smaller towns to a great extent. They can be delivered in ways in which it is often difficult otherwise.

• (2010)

Mr. Barry Devolin: Mr. Chair, the minister has said many times that this is the first of many steps. I have taken the Quebec model and used the numbers to determine how many spaces are being provided in Quebec and extrapolated that cost structure across the country. It would cost in excess of \$10 billion a year to implement that nationwide for all children.

The federal government is talking about \$1 billion a year which begs the question, where is the other \$9 billion coming from? If I were a provincial or municipal official, I would be deeply concerned that the federal government was going to launch something with great fanfare and I was going to end up with a large part of the tab.

Ontario has early years centres which are actually geared toward parents taking their children in. The children and the parents can have an enriched learning opportunity. Many stay at home parents use these centres on a regular basis, including my wife with our own children. It would appear that the Ontario government is moving away from that. It is starving the early years centres of funds and moving those dollars into the school based system. I see there may be some disagreement with that point.

I would like to ask the minister, does he support the early years centre program in Ontario? Does he think it is valuable for the work it does for stay at home parents? Will he ensure, in his negotiations with Ontario, that early years centres are properly supported?

Hon. Ken Dryden: Mr. Chair, we indirectly help support those centres now. They do good work.

Business of Supply

As I said earlier, in terms of providing services for parents and for kids all kinds of different services are needed, and that is one of them. They do good work. I would suspect that a lot of the child care centres, five or ten years from now, will have that kind of component. It will be almost naturally within them.

One of the great advantages of a child care centre is that three year olds cannot walk to it by themselves. They need to get there somehow. They need to get there with their parents. Their parents have the opportunity to walk through the door of a child care centre in a way which they cannot do in an elementary school or a high school.

Once they are through that door things can start to happen. They can see what is going on. They can meet with other parents, talk with other parents, and talk to the people who are there. They can learn. They can turn something that was an accident into something quite important and useful. That is what the natural evolution is going to move toward.

Hon. Eleni Bakopanos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Social Development (Social Economy), Lib.): Mr. Chair, I want to change the subject a bit, but it is very much related in terms of what our department is all about. It is about communities; it is about people. I want to talk about a file that I had the privilege to pilot through the federal government.

● (2015)

[Translation]

This is a new file for the federal government, but not for Quebec's elected representatives. Quebec has had a social economy for 20 years. Internationally, however, the movement has been known in Italy since 1800. It is a movement of cooperation and collaboration between individuals and communities.

I am really delighted the federal government has decided to look into the matter and try to give communities the means and resources they need to look after their own people and their needs.

[English]

The social economy for me is a movement. It is not a program. It is a movement which is citizen-led and community driven. The role that a government should play is a role that is fundamental in terms of how I view and how the department has viewed the establishment of this framework. How do we give tools to citizens, how do we give tools to those who are disadvantaged, and how do we give tools and resources for them to be able to improve their own well-being and that of their community?

I had the privilege of visiting across Canada, when I was nominated as the parliamentary secretary, different non-governmental organizations that have provided work and other tools for their citizens. It was one of the privileges to see how men and women from all walks of life take responsibility for their future and the future of their communities. We as a government would like to empower them and give them the tools to do so.

One of the examples actually is not very far from here. It is called the Good Day Workshop which is here in Ottawa. This is a non-profit outreach program which specializes in providing furniture refurbishing by hiring persons with special needs due to addictions,

those suffering from poor mental health, the homeless and the unemployed. Participants in this type of social enterprise program have much to gain in the way of new skills, sheltered work, limited shared income and peer support.

[Translation]

Also in my riding of Ahuntsic, there is an organization known as Amrac. As in the example I mentioned before, people are learning restoration and furniture building at the Atelier de meubles recyclés Ahuntsic-Cartierville, and the furniture is sold to the disadvantaged, who pay a modest sum and not market price. So they invest in a training program for the unemployed and in the purchase of equipment.

The difference between private enterprise and a social enterprise is that the profits generated by a social enterprise return to the organization to give greater opportunity to those who are unemployed to have a few resources and a job and make a contribution to society.

[English]

One of the best definitions that was ever given to me of the social economy was how do we take disadvantaged groups out of being dependent on the government and the state. How do we make them productive members of the economy? I think that is the role of our department through our various programs in not making people dependent but by giving people the tools and the resources that they need in order to become productive members of our society.

[Translation]

As parliamentary secretary, I had the pleasure of visiting a dollar store in Halifax affiliated with Nova Scotia hospitals. It hires and trains persons with a disability to get them into the labour market while it sells items at an affordable price to local residents. I was there when people came into the store. Those who are working there are clearly proud of having a job and doing something useful for society. That is what they want to give.

In Vancouver, at the other end of the country, I visited Potluck Cafe. I believe one of my colleagues knows it well, because people living in Vancouver know the cafe. It is located downtown and looks like the usual cafe. However, the meals are free or at low cost to those in need. The cafe is subsidized by the revenues it generates as a high end caterer. It hires and trains people from the neighbourhood.

● (2020)

[English]

Canada has one of the most vibrant, non profit sectors in the world. About 10,000 enterprises and organizations employ about 100,000 people across the country. They deliver a wide variety of services, be it health, education, employment, social services and community development, from the arts to culture to religion, sports, recreation and the environment.

Organizations like these are an integral part of Canadian life and I want to ensure that we all thank the volunteers who actually give their time, talent and energy to ensure that their fellow citizens have a better quality of life. That is the essence of what we are trying to do in terms of both the social economy and the other programs we have put in place in social development.

Business of Supply

To fully understand the social economy and how it contributes to a healthy community requires a closer look at the complex factors that help to determine the quality of life in communities. Issues such as employment and economic conditions, natural environment, housing, health and social supports each affect the social climate within a community. No one body can provide all of the links in this chain of factors. When conditions are less than optimal, it takes a collaborative approach to find successful solutions.

How did we set up this collaborative approach? When I was first nominated, I decided to go to the expertise. There are organizations that have been working in the area of social economy across Canada. We brought the stakeholders together and created a national round table. Through the recommendations of that national round table is how we hope to put together a framework that not only involves Social Development Canada but involves also Industry Canada and the four regional development agencies across the country which would in fact deliver in terms of the promise that we have made.

I was pleased in fact as parliamentary secretary to make the first announcement with the Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec. We announced \$30 million over five years to be delivered through a third party, which is in a bidding process right now, in order to allow the third party with its expertise in terms of this file to give to non-governmental agencies and social entrepreneurs those funds and their patient capital funds, which we can go into further detail if anybody would like, to ensure that social enterprises keep growing and employing more in our society who are disadvantaged.

My department is also working to help community based efforts that improve the lives of children, seniors, families living in poverty and other vulnerable Canadians. I am sure we will have another chance to talk about this later.

I want to talk about something that the minister mentioned earlier which was elicited in the form of a question. I want to share an example of 12 communities from across Canada that found, through dialogue, innovative solutions in a pilot program called understanding the early years. As many of us know, early learning in child care is a priority for many communities. Understanding the early years is an initiative that helps communities develop a detailed picture of how their five year olds are faring as they prepare to enter school and how services and programs within the community can be changed to improve their children's readiness to learn.

[*Translation*]

This unique approach is based on an expanded local partnership between residents and organizations with similar concerns and who, together, have the power to influence community programs and services. In return, communities get a realistic sense of the situation and are able to respond to the challenges.

The very successful program called understanding the early years has been expanded to include up to 100 new communities over the next few years.

Other community success stories are due to the popular new horizons for seniors program. I had the pleasure recently, along with the minister, of making two announcements in my riding of Ahuntsic about two organizations working with seniors. One of them has

created an amazing web site; it is designed by seniors for seniors, but it is also designed to help young people. This is an extremely innovative and extraordinary initiative. Thanks to this program by our government, we were able to allocate funds for the creation of this web site. We will be watching this organization closely, because I think that this will be the start of something that could prove useful for other non-governmental organizations working with seniors and wanting to help young people. The intergenerational aspect of this project was extremely interesting to us.

The new horizons program examines the needs of seniors by creating opportunities for them to take part in their community. We encourage seniors to play an active role in their communities, because we want them to continue to contribute to society.

• (2025)

[*English*]

We are also putting in place the necessary tools to help communities grow along with the social economy. As Canadian society becomes more complex and diverse, it is imperative to continue this dialogue with communities so that we may find new approaches to new challenges which undoubtedly will follow.

While some communities are experiencing significant success in addressing these challenges, other communities are finding it difficult to identify innovative solutions. We have to encourage dialogue. As I said, the national round table on social economy encourages dialogue and encourages bringing to the table innovative ways of looking at our problems and finding solutions to the problems which communities are trying to solve.

We know that dialogue with communities produces effective solutions. We also know that more sharing of information and more research into best practices are also necessary. That is why our department is actively pursuing these two areas to learn more about what works best and how best to spread these successes to more communities.

This approach has been central in terms of our current work with communities as I mentioned earlier. We will continue those efforts through ongoing dialogue at the local level, with the voluntary sector, and by working with coalitions that participate in programs such as the understanding the early years initiative.

Communities are built on social partnerships. The strength of these communities in turn is reflected in the social economy and other actions of our department. As a government, we must aspire to work smarter to help communities reach their full potential. That is what we are committed to in social development. That is what we will continue to be devoted to.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Gagnon (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Chair, I will try not to shoot as many questions at the minister as my colleague has just been doing. We in Quebec were used to seeing him in net for the Canadiens and he was known then as able to handle anything that came at him. This feels a bit like another hockey game here.

This evening, we are having a really interesting discussion. We all want the same: help us do more for the community. I think that the solution to all our problems would quite simply be to respect provincial jurisdictions. This evening, in fact, the topic of discussion is a provincial responsibility.

I have been a Quebec MLA. I have worked for the people you have been talking about. I have helped social workers organize. The whole problem is the two levels of government that are butting heads. There is a shameful waste of energy and money. Why are we against the creation of this department? Not because we have anything against the minister or the people that will make up that department, but because the money going to the 14,000 employees will not be getting to the provinces, to Quebec, to meet the needs we are talking about.

I appreciated my colleague's story about helping his elderly parents when they were dying. I had a similar experience in my own family barely three weeks ago. It is true that people need to be helped, but as long as there are two levels of government looking after the same thing, energy and money will be wasted.

The minister was saying "Help us". Let us go back to the beginnings of this country, the Canadian Constitution, with its division of responsibilities and powers. There were provisions to ensure that each did what was its responsibility.

With the federal government it is not like that. In committee, I saw a diagram that illustrated it, but I do not have it with me. The federal government is feeling an increasing need to be everywhere. Rather than deal with the fiscal imbalance and return the money to the provinces for health, education, help to families and so on, they work along side the provincial government, establish their presence and duplicate the work, as if the two were competing over the same place. This results in wasted money, and on top of that there is a problem with control.

I recall in committee a question being put to the Minister of National Revenue, which caused him a little grief. He said that the department had become so huge that it was hard to control everything. Indeed, the machine has become so big it wastes a lot of money.

I would make a little aside. For as long as I have been an MLA and an MP I have known that it sometimes does not take a lot of money to resolve a problem. The government members know this. They announced \$30,000 for a project in Quebec. I will refer only to the stolen part of the sponsorship scandal, the \$100 million that has not been found. I am not accusing anyone. I am not referring to the entire budget for the sponsorship scandal, which is open to question, I refer to the part stolen. I divided it by 300 members. Do you know that each MP would have \$333,000 for their community?

Do you know what can be done in a riding with this amount? It is pretty big. More can be done than was done with the sponsorship scandal, you will agree. A number of people can be helped. But there are too many people. Two governments are getting in each other's way and duplicating efforts, often causing each other harm.

I think this would be a way to help us carry out all the fine projects. I honestly think they want to see them succeed.

● (2030)

The issue I am concerned with has to do with seniors. A few years ago, it was discovered that thousands of seniors across Canada, some 270,000 cases recognized by the department, had not received the guaranteed income supplement to which they were entitled.

To get to the bottom of this, I toured Quebec and saw some awful things. In Sherbrooke, a woman passed away at age 88 after living through her old age on \$6,000 a year. At the time of her death, the government owed her \$90,000 in guaranteed income supplement. I have seen some terrible things.

I have two or three questions for the minister. Can he assure us that all seniors who are entitled to receive the guaranteed income supplement will receive it? When this file was handed over to us, there were 270,000 cases in Canada, including 68,000 in Quebec. The tour and the intense investigating that followed allowed us to find nearly half the cases. Some 110,000 seniors across Canada still were not receiving the guaranteed income supplement they were entitled to. I want to know if there are still any cases today and, if so, how many. I have another question I will ask later.

[English]

Hon. Ken Dryden: Mr. Chair, I will share the answer with my two colleagues.

Very quickly, in respect of his first remarks, happily I was in the net on a team where I was rarely bombarded with pucks, so that was a good thing.

In terms of the basic tone of what the member said, I do not accept the tone. I do not accept the tone of frittering away, of wasted money, of competing in that way. The experience most of the time in most circumstances is something that really is a collaborative arrangement. Even in the last number of months, whether it was negotiations over parental leave, earlier in terms of health care, all of them involved negotiations with the government of Quebec. All of them led to resolution in terms of the government of Quebec.

I will pass it over to my colleague in terms of the member's questions on seniors.

● (2035)

The Chair: This is a little irregular. The hon. Minister of State for Families and Caregivers.

Hon. Tony Ianno: Mr. Chair, I know that the hon. member has a great concern in terms of retroactivity and those who were eligible but were not receiving the GIS at the time. The department sends out hundreds of thousands of information packages. We have outreach people. We continue trying to find ways—

Business of Supply

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Gagnon: Excuse me, Mr. Chair, I am the only one asking questions, but two ministers responded. Is that correct? I was told we were to use a one to one ratio. Is that right?

[English]

The Chair: I tried to see if the member was in agreement. On the government side there are two different ministers who would like to respond, if that is suitable. Otherwise we will alternate back and forth and the member can ask another separate question. Would you like to hear from the minister of state?

[Translation]

The hon. member for Saint-Maurice—Champlain, who may ask another question.

Mr. Marcel Gagnon: Mr. Chair, I have a number of questions. I will ask the questions, and one or the other can answer. The question is in fact unchanged, and the minister will answer it shortly.

I would like to point out that the people denied the guaranteed income supplement were denied it—it has been admitted—because the government did not provide the information they were entitled to. I find that abnormal.

I can provide specific cases of people who did not get the money, either because they were not informed or because they were misinformed. The former minister had resolved the problem. The proof they were misinformed is that things have since been changed. Why not agree to full and complete back payments, or at least five years?

When a 70 year old couple—both of them—were denied \$20,000 for five years, the government was found to be responsible. The couple gains \$4,000 and loses \$20,000. Why not apply the same rules to those who are owed money as to those to whom the government owes money? When money is owed to the government, retroactive payment is not limited to 11 months. Could the period of retroactive payment for seniors not be at least five years?

There has even been a class action about this. It is incredible to see the arguments the government comes up with to not give in. Yet these people are owed money.

As for the assistance you are giving, would there be a possibility—I am troubled to hear the minister saying that I am insulting him with my tone of voice, when I think my tone is as friendly as can be—to tell seniors that the \$2.7 billion that will be going out over the next five years is coming out of the \$3.2 billion saved? Seniors were poorly informed. They are not being given money, they are just being reimbursed. Over the past 11 or 12 years \$3.2 billion has been saved and now \$2.7 billion will be given back over the next 5 years, starting in 2006.

I would like to know the minister's reaction to this. I see this as a fairly honest way to settle this. We want to see seniors get full retroactivity.

• (2040)

[English]

Hon. Tony Ianno: Mr. Chair, I just want to clear up one thing. The member indicated that I said something about him being

insulting. I did not say that. Perhaps the translation did not get it right.

The hon. member was a member of the government in Quebec. It too has 11 months retroactivity on its programs. I wish he had fought as hard when he was a member of the Quebec provincial government to change all the programs to five years as he so desires.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Gagnon: Mr. Speaker, I will correct that. There was reference made to 11 months retroactivity in Quebec. I do not want to say that is false, but there has been an error. The retroactivity for the Régie des rentes du Québec is—

[English]

The Chair: Order. I think that is a point of debate. It is not a point of order. We have to give the minister a fair amount of time to give his answer. He has a minute and a half or so.

Hon. Tony Ianno: Mr. Chair, I know that the member is passionate about the issue. First of all I do not think anyone would like to see anyone who should have been eligible for the GIS not get it.

Out of the 1.5 million Canadians who receive the GIS, 1.3 million automatically receive it through their tax returns. Unfortunately, 200,000 or thereabouts do not apply when they do their income taxes. Therefore applications are sent out to them every year. Unfortunately some do not respond. That is why we continue trying in every way possible to work with other levels of government, to work with our outreach people to go out, knock on the doors, do advertising, to find ways to reach as many seniors who are eligible so that they get what they deserve.

As members know with the \$2.7 billion in this budget, it is the first time in Canadian budget history that seniors have been a line item in a main budget. I am very proud that \$700 million a year will go to low income seniors, \$433 when fully implemented. I am very proud of what the government has done.

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I am extremely pleased to be here tonight. I will be posing a question to the minister in a moment, but first I would like to talk about a passion. I have spent at least 10 years working very hard on some issues. In particular I along with my colleagues have worked hard on issues involving children and seniors, and for very good reasons.

There are nearly one million single seniors in the country. Most of them are women who are living in poverty. That is why the government, with the aggressive work of the women's caucus, a social policy caucus which I chair, and my colleagues have worked very hard to make sure that we have proper programs for seniors. The budget includes, as the minister just mentioned, increasing the guaranteed income supplement by \$2.7 billion, doubling the caregiver program, the new horizons program, which is absolutely fantastic, as well as establishing the secretariat to make sure that programming and dialoguing with seniors is not a one time thing but is a long term commitment on the part of our government. This is extremely important for seniors in my riding and in the rest of the country.

Business of Supply

My colleagues and I have also worked very hard on the children's agenda. I have always believed that investing in children and families remains one of the best ways to enhance the social economic fabric of the country. For me it is an economic policy, not just a social policy. Eight MPs, of which I was one, pushed and fought for close to a year to get the Canada child tax benefit and national child benefit supplement for low income families started. In 1996 we did that work. The government started investing in children and today it helps more than 3.5 million families defray the cost of raising their children. By 2007 investments through these initiatives is projected to reach \$10 billion. This is where I think we make a great difference in the lives of families.

In 2000 maternity and parental benefits through the employment insurance program were extended to provide replacement income for up to a year while a new parent stays at home with their newborn or newly adopted child. These benefits go a long way to help parents balance the demands of work and family life. In 2003, 86.4% of women with insurable earnings and with children under 12 months of age received maternity and/or parental benefits. The number of parental claims established by men also continued to increase although at a slower rate than when the enhancements were first introduced. About 11% of men claimed or intended to claim parental benefits. This is an inclusive program and it is very important.

The Canada pension plan also has a provision to ensure parents who take time out from full time work to raise their young children do not experience reduced pensions later in life. This is very important for mothers and fathers who wish to stay at home with their children and are able to continue and do not have to give up their own financial security for when they retire.

In addition, the government has introduced targeted measures for children with disabilities and their families, including the new child disability benefit and other tax based initiatives. These are helping families with the additional costs associated with raising a child with disabilities.

Through joint initiatives with the provinces and territories, the government is also helping to improve and expand our range of early childhood development programs. The understanding the early years initiative will expand to at least 100 more communities across Canada. Through it the government is helping provide communities with the information they need to ensure that children are ready to learn when they start school. There is nothing more valuable than investing in our children. There is nothing more valuable than ensuring that not just those children who have money, who have parents at home, but all parents have a choice and their children are able to start learning early. We are talking about early education, not about child minding, which people sometimes confuse.

Early learning and child care is extremely important, yet for all of this valuable support from the Government of Canada, gaps remain. We know that. In particular most families still do not have access to the kind of quality early learning and child care programs that can help set their young children on the path to success. This we know is a fact, as we know that nearly 70% to 80% of parents in our society work.

● (2045)

It is crucial that Canada do more. Research clearly indicates that access to quality early learning programs contributes significantly to the healthy development of young children. It also affects the ability of many parents to participate in the labour force. This is important because the great majority of families with low income, lone parents, persons with disabilities, et cetera, are families with only one income. Living in poverty of course has a huge effect on a child's development.

Further, even children who are cared for primarily by a parent at home can benefit from taking part in nursery school or preschool programs for a few hours each week. We have seen this with the early years programs. A lot of parents who are at home in fact do bring their children to these programs. However, there are not enough spaces for these children. Even those who can afford to pay full fees cannot find suitable child care arrangements.

Seven out of ten children under the age of six live in a household where both parents or their lone parent are in the workforce or in school. Yet only one in five child care spaces in our country is regulated. One out of five is not good enough. It is absolutely not good enough. Moreover, programs are too expensive for many parents and the quality varies dramatically across and within provinces and territories.

The government has moved to address these concerns through the multilateral framework of early learning and child care established in 2003. The Government of Canada is transferring more than \$1 billion over five years to provinces and territories. Budget 2005 confirmed ongoing funding for this initiative at \$350 million per year.

These investments are already making an impact. They are improving early learning and support for children across the country.

Budget 2005 also confirmed the Government of Canada's commitment to invest an additional \$5 billion over five years for a new national initiative to accelerate the development of an early learning and child care system in every province and territory in the country. This is an early learning and child care system based on the QUAD principles: quality, universally inclusive, accessible and developmental.

The Government of Canada is now working with each province and territory to help with bilateral agreements in principle. These agreements will set out the overarching national vision, principles and goals for early learning and child care; clear and measurable objectives; funding levels and eligible areas for investment; strong accountability through public reporting; a commitment to collaborate with each other on knowledge, information and best practices; and a provincial and territorial commitment to develop an action plan for the period of federal funding in consultation with citizens and stakeholders.

Business of Supply

This is extremely important. This is what Canadians have been asking for for decades. This is what the activists and the women and mothers and fathers out there have been asking for: accountability, quality, regulated, accessible, affordable. These are the things that matter to families. It is extremely important. I am proud that this is what is in our budget and that this is our plan.

At this point I want to ask the minister one question. I think the importance of this program to me is extremely clear. There are some members in the House who still seem to have doubts as to how important this program is.

I would like to ask the minister, how will the Government of Canada ensure flexibility and choice within a national framework for early learning and child care so that Canadian families can give their children the best possible start in life?

Choice is important. We have heard that tonight. I believe that our proposal and our program will in fact offer that. I would appreciate it very much if the minister would address that.

• (2050)

Hon. Ken Dryden: Mr. Chair, I appreciate the comments and the question from the member for Beaches—East York. She has worked very long and very hard on this issue. We talked earlier about not a lot happening before the commitment that was made last year. It is voices like hers and others in the House that kept it very much alive and allowed this sort of thing to happen.

The question mentioned the range of programs and supports that the Government of Canada provides for children and parents. There is the Canada child tax benefit, the national child benefit supplement, maternity and parental benefits through employment insurance, the child disability benefit and the rapidly expanding understanding the early years initiative. This is the context into which to put the government's commitment of \$5 billion over five years to support provincial and territorial efforts in early learning and child care.

At the centre of a child's life is their relationship with their parents. That has always been the case, it is the case and it always will be the case. The lives of parents and the lives of families can and do change over time. The challenge for a child to develop and learn to his or her fullest potential remains the same. Early learning and child care is not, was never intended to be and never will be the only answer to a child's development, just as elementary school and high school are not understood as the only answers to learning and education.

Simply put, early learning and child care is a tool, one of many, for a child's development and for parents to use as they see fit. We must never forget that for the great majority of Canadian parents early learning and child care is an important tool. Seventy per cent of parents with children under the age of six are both in the workforce.

The great majority of those kids are in child care of some form, but not in a form that is good enough. Only 20% are in regulated care and not in a form that reflects the importance of learning and development in a child's early years, not in a form that utilizes best the opportunities of all those hours of a day, days of a week, weeks of a year, years of a life, all the possibilities. With this time, is it an opportunity to be realized or an opportunity that will be missed?

We want parents to have real choice. We want them to have the chance to choose quality, to choose affordability and to choose availability. We did not build schools by putting money into parents' pockets and then asking them to get together if they wished to put some of that money into a pot to build a school or to hire teachers. We did not build hospitals or roads that way either. We decided that schools, hospitals and roads were important enough to enough people and were important enough to our present and future society that we put that public money directly toward them. That is what we are doing with early learning and child care.

At the same time, there is remarkable flexibility in an early learning and child care system; the scale is so small, the system so much still evolving. The Government of Canada comes to agreement with the provinces and territories on the principles, expectations, understandings and accountabilities. The provinces and territories decide on how best to meet those obligations, with the flexibility to find different answers for rural areas and big cities and with the flexibility to meet the circumstances of linguistic minorities, off hours or specific needs.

This is not an elementary school. This does not require a core of 150 students and millions of dollars for a building to make everything work. Nor is early learning and child care an all or nothing: something for eight hours a day, five days a week, 50 weeks a year or nothing. No, it is not all or nothing. Even most stay at home parents want some time in the week for their children to have other experiences with other kids in other places. Early learning and child care can be two mornings a week or a day a week for parents and kids as they see fit.

Nothing ever offers an answer for everything. The health care system does not. The education system does not. Even if we would like them to do more, doing what they do matters, and matters a lot. We are a lot better off because of them, and we will be a lot better off for an early learning and child care system in every province and every territory in this country.

• (2055)

Hon. Maria Minna: Mr. Chair, I would like to go to another aspect of the program. This is more a matter of information for my constituents and of course for Canadians.

As members know, I am a member of the finance committee. The finance committee is seized with the budget right now. We had some discussion about that this afternoon. There is an attempt by the official opposition to sever the bill into several pieces. This afternoon there were motions presented. One talked about severing off the Atlantic accord and the other talked about severing off the environmental part of the budget. I do not know what else might be coming.

I have a question for the minister because I am very concerned. If the budget does not pass before the House rises for the summer, what will happen to the \$700 million which has been allocated for early education and child care? I think it is important for Canadians to know that.

Business of Supply

Hon. Ken Dryden: Mr. Chair, everything is put at risk. That is what happens. It is a very simple thing. It is at risk or it is not.

As the great majority of Canadians have expressed, this is something that matters to them. It matters a lot to them. The question that I have been asking for the last month or longer is, "What is the rush?" What is the rush in all of this for something that the public is looking for, expects and hopes for? It is an amount of money, \$700 million this year, that represents a 30% increase on all money that is spent by all governments in this country at this particular time for the kind of benefit we are talking about.

In whose interests is a budget bill put at risk? Finally, after all this time, we are moving toward a real system of early learning and child care, which people have worked so long for. We are finally getting this kind of push with the kind of public reaction that has happened with those announcements and here we have some members of the House deciding to put it all at risk.

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Chair, I will be splitting my time with my distinguished colleague, the hon. member for Durham. I will also be posing a series of brief questions and my sincere hope is that the Chair will enforce that the answers be brief in kind.

First, in the spirit of being brief, this minister has indicated on many occasions that he does not feel parents are up to the job of raising their own children. My wife and I recently had our fourth child, a lovely little boy. Could the minister tell me at what age and why he thinks his \$10 billion per year program will do a better job of raising my children than my wife and I can?

• (2100)

Hon. Ken Dryden: Mr. Chair, in the interests of being brief, first of all, I never said what he said I said. Second, I do not believe what he alleges. I believe what I have said every time I talk about the issue, every time I have talked about it tonight and as anyone who has been a parent. I am a parent of two children. I take very seriously being a parent of two children. They are 30 years old and 27 years old. We were a central part in raising them, as all of their other activities were a part of their being raised, and as early learning and child care can be a part of the development of a child as well.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Mr. Chair, the minister and his department have funded plenty of research projects and activists to bolster his big government knows best approach, projects advocating limited or no choice for parents. Can the minister inform us of what groups opposed to the Liberal anti-choice child care and early learning agenda have received funding and how much funding they have received?

Hon. Ken Dryden: Mr. Chair, I am not aware of the answer to that question. I will take it under advisement. We will try to find the answer for the member.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Mr. Chair, the minister likes to compare the beginnings of the child care program with the beginnings of the universal education system. However, he forgets one important point: the education system recognizes the importance of choice. Within our education system we have private schools, charter schools, religious based education, public education and home schools.

This is my question for the minister. Why can we not have the same freedom of choice, the same broad numbers of choices, with early learning and child care? Why a monolithic system?

Hon. Ken Dryden: Mr. Chair, once again the hon. member completely misstates what in fact is the plan and is being done.

If the hon. member wants to compare apples with apples in terms of an education system, of elementary and high school, up to a certain age all children are required to attend school during that period of time.

Home-schooling is absolutely a choice under early learning and child care. Anyone who does not want to have their child as part of early learning and child care can home-school their children. At the same time, different from an elementary school or a high school, which is a five day a week and a 40 week a year understanding, that is not what early learning and child care is. There is a much broader choice as to what a parent may want.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Mr. Chair, home education is seven days a week.

Here is my fourth question. Clearly this Liberal babysitting program is not about meeting the diverse needs of parents. Institutional day care is consistently a parent's least preferred option for child care. This Liberal program offers no choice to parents in the type of care they can choose from. All Canadian families must pay into this two tier program, but only a selected few will be able to count on actual assistance. This is not a universal program except that it is universally unpopular.

Why will the minister not adjust his \$10 billion a year program to allow fair choices for all families no matter where or to whom the parents choose to take their children?

Hon. Ken Dryden: Mr. Chair, the hon. member is just plain ritualistically and jargonistically wrong in everything he says. All one has to do is look at the experience of what is being offered by child care centres now and what would be offered under this kind of program. Clearly the hon. member has not taken the time or the trouble to take in that experience for himself.

I would wish for him that at some point he would, that he would move beyond a piece of paper, that he would move beyond arm's length learning and in fact go to the source. I would wish for him that he would go into a child care centre, see what it looks like, see what it feels like, see the engagement of those children, see the look in their eyes, and see how they move around, adventure, explore and are engaged.

• (2105)

Mr. Jeff Watson: Mr. Chair, let me quote the minister, who said tonight that a child's central developmental relationship is with parents. Further, he said that it is the case and it will always be the case. Why then does the minister promote a program that separates parents and children, thereby harming this central developmental relationship?

Business of Supply

Hon. Ken Dryden: Mr. Chair, I really do not even know where to begin to answer any of these questions because they are so remote from the experience that anyone lives. The 70% of families with both parents in the workplace have voted with their feet. They have decided that this matters to them a lot, that this experience for their children matters to them a lot.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Mr. Chair, the minister said tonight that the system can be "accessed by all", or in other words, just make the choice. Currently many parents choose grandparents or other relatives to watch and teach their kids. Through taxes, these parents pay the cost of these programs. They have no choice in that. To access them, they must break other family relationships. Why does the minister force a real cost but give no real choice to these parents?

Hon. Ken Dryden: Mr. Chair, as I mentioned before, every program that is offered by anybody represents choices made and choices not made.

What I very much look forward to is the time at which the member's party decides to come forward with its program. I look forward to seeing what choices are made there, what those choices represent, who has benefited and who has not benefited. We all know what choice they came forward with last May and June: a \$2,000 tax credit, which would offer the princely sum of an advantage for the lowest income child of \$320 when the average cost of child care is over \$8,000.

Ms. Bev Oda (Durham, CPC): Mr. Chair, if I may, I will be asking a series of questions.

Canada is made up of many cultures. I have seen and participated in many of the diverse communities in my home province of Ontario. I know that each of our communities has its own traditions and values as to its sense of family and its children.

I have seen the children at Villa Columbo in Toronto's Italian community, where preschool children interact with their grandparents and other seniors because that child care centre is part of a community based seniors centre within that community.

At the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre, the day care centre is housed in the midst of a culturally rich milieu, where children can learn Japanese and the traditional arts, songs and activities of their families' heritage.

The parents of these children choose to place their children in these centres because their heritage and their traditions are important to them. They choose to respect their heritage and they know that in the wider educational system their heritage is only introduced as one of a foreign land and is seen as an activity or traditions that are only exotic curiosities. These parents protest. They want this type of choice for their preschool children.

How will the minister meet the needs of these families and permit a choice for cultural diversity within his child care program?

Hon. Ken Dryden: Mr. Chair, as I said earlier in the evening, one of the great advantages of early learning and child care is its scale. It is a lot smaller than a school system. Given that it is a lot smaller in scale, it is something that can work with fewer kids. It is something that can work with less of an infrastructure which will result in less cost to that kind of infrastructure. It allows for all kinds of possibilities in the way in which the hon. member suggests; for

various different linguistic communities and cultural communities. There are many early learning and child care centres now that are specifically for what the hon. member talks about and surely there will be many more in the future.

• (2110)

Ms. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, I received a letter from my constituent last week in which she relates that her parents have now been able to join her in Canada. She was quite excited because the grandparents would now have the responsibility of caring for the children while her and her husband were at work. They are shift workers and also hold multiple jobs in order to make ends meet. This was a great advantage to them because they were not able to find any facilities in the community, which is a small rural community, to meet their needs.

With respect to recent immigrants who are forced to sometimes work in multiple jobs, shift workers and so on, could the minister tell me how this program will assist them in meeting their needs? As I understand it, and I would like an explanation, this is focused toward those who have more regular jobs that are within what would be commonly known as a work day and the amount of flexibility that this particular family requires may not be met with the type of program that the minister is suggesting, particularly under the agreement with Ontario, as I read the agreement.

I am wondering where the choice for this family and similar families will be in the program.

Hon. Ken Dryden: Mr. Chair, as the hon. member mentioned and as we have talked about before, each province will work out its own priorities in that particular way.

Clearly shift work and the kind of circumstances that the member is describing are much more of a fact of life now than they might have been 10 or 20 years ago.

Once again, I go back to what I was saying before about the flexibility that is inherent in a system that has a number of parts that are of much smaller scale.

I would imagine that while the great majority of child care centres, at least in the foreseeable years, will not be able to provide a lot of what the member is talking about in terms of shift hours assistance or on Sundays but I suspect that some would. I suspect that would be their approach, their way of filling a need within a particular community, and it would be their way of making their application to the provincial government successful.

Ms. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, the expectations from those in my constituency are that they should benefit as equally from their tax dollars as any other family in the community. I have a large agricultural community and many of those people are here on the basis of seasonal work and are able to bring their families with them. They are farmers and farmers do not have nine to five working hours. Seeding and harvesting the land are seasonal requirements and often both parents have to be out in the fields working. Therefore their demands for assistance as far as their preschool children and their infants are concerned vary according to the season and according to their own schedules.

Business of Supply

I have read the agreement signed in the province of Ontario and some of the other agreements. What studies or what work has been done to expand the benefit of the child care program that is proposed to meet the unique needs of these families? These families are equally an important part of Canada as part of Canada's economy, as part of Canada's food production and as part of Canada's heritage as well, and they want to maintain this. They have been able to do this traditionally through family care, through neighbour care, et cetera. However it does not seem to me that I am seeing any of their tax dollar benefits coming back to assist them with their needs.

• (2115)

Hon. Ken Dryden: Mr. Chair, in fairness to the question, and it is a good question, I think there is also some fairness to the answer, which is that it is a big challenge, just as one would imagine a big challenge if we filled in the blank, instead of a child care centre, we filled it with an elementary school. That is not part of what our expectation is for an elementary school or a high school, that it is available at whatever the hours that are convenient insofar as the way in which parents live.

Now, as I said earlier, the good news in this is that the larger scale systems and institutions are that much less flexible. The smaller scale like this has a much greater chance at flexibility and of adapting much more quickly to the kinds of needs the member suggests.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I am pleased to have the opportunity tonight to speak in this very important debate on the main estimates for Human Resources and Social Development.

To begin my remarks this evening, I would like to touch on our recent budget, which includes many initiatives for Canada's seniors. This budget makes significant investments in seniors programs from health care to income security, from retirement savings to assistance for their care givers. Our constant goal is to enhance the quality of life for all seniors and we must always remember that this country was built by the seniors we have today.

The guaranteed income supplement provides low income seniors with a benefit that ensures a basic level of income throughout their retirement years.

In 2004, our government, under the great leadership of our Prime Minister and a great Minister of State for Families and Caregivers, made a commitment, along with the rest of our colleagues, to increase the guaranteed income supplement by \$1.5 billion over the next five years. That was clearly illustrated in platforms and in items that we have distributed.

However budget 2005 goes above and beyond that commitment. We will increase the guaranteed income supplement benefits for low income seniors, not by \$1.5 billion, but by \$2.7 billion over two years. By 2007 the maximum guaranteed income supplement will be increased by more than \$400 per year for a single senior and by almost \$700 for a couple.

Seniors are and want to remain active members of our society. The budget increases support for the hugely successful New Horizons program which promotes voluntary sector activity and supports our seniors. Annual funding will increase to \$25 million by 2007 and

2008. This a very popular program among many Canadians and many seniors.

The budget provides \$13 million over five years to establish a new national senior secretariat so that we can focus as a government on the many needs of our seniors today.

Seniors have concerns about a range of issues. They include pensions, the health care system, pharmacare, housing and the difficulties associated with living on a fixed income. We hear about it every day.

Our government is committed to upholding the retirement system that provides Canadians with the opportunity to live with dignity and security and the other social programs which define our country and make Canada the best place to live at all stages of a person's life.

The government's strong fiscal management, economic growth and the successful reform of the Canada pension plan have allowed us to safeguard the quality of life for Canada's seniors.

Back in 1997, this government had to reconstruct the Canada pension plan in order to meet the increased demands of an aging population and to ensure its sustainability. It was a difficult move but an important decision to make.

Since 1999, the federal government has invested more than \$35 billion to support the renewal of our health care system, research and other health promotion programs. Our government has taken a leadership role to ensure that our health care system remains high quality and meets the needs of our aging population.

Canada's seniors need to know that there is a place for them in our society, that they are of value to us and that they will continue to play a vital role in the community. We will continue a role of mutual respect and understanding. Our valued seniors deserve to benefit from a retirement income system that ensures their ability to live in dignity. Our 2005 budget demonstrates that commitment to our seniors.

Members present in the chamber this evening, such as myself and others, have many constituents who are either on the verge of entering their senior years or planning for them.

I would like to ask the Minister of State for Families and Caregivers the following question: How best can the government work with the other partners in society to meet the changing needs and priorities of seniors in the coming years and to ensure that the actions we take now will endure for the many years ahead?

• (2120)

Hon. Tony Ianno (Minister of State (Families and Caregivers), Lib.): Mr. Chair, I would like to congratulate the hon. member for York West who has been working with seniors for a countless number of years. Every several days she has a new group coming into Ottawa and hosts a great number, including a group of 110 seniors from her constituency tomorrow, with whom I hope to meet.

Business of Supply

There is a lot we should be excited about regarding our seniors. In 1980 the poverty rate was at 21% and in 2003 it was below 7%. We have a way to go but we will work very hard with all members of the House. We know that without our seniors, who worked to build this great nation, we would not have democracy, freedom and the respect we have around the world.

We should take into account members on this side of the House who have been working on issues regarding with seniors for many years. There are several here today, including the member for Beaches—East York and many others who continue to work with us to ensure that we are always ahead of the curve when it comes to our seniors, who we all respect.

The Prime Minister's task force made 17 recommendations only a year ago and close to 13 of them already have been implemented. We are working toward a way of reducing poverty among seniors and giving them the kind of dignity and respect we all want for our own families.

The hon. member mentioned the GIS increase. When someone is earning \$12,400, the amount of \$433 is not a lot but it is a good beginning. It cost the government \$700 million a year. Along with that we have a new senior secretariat that will be formed when the budget passes. This will allow us to be the lens, where all issues from all levels of government will be dealt with in a way that we around the cabinet table can ensure that any issue that affects seniors will be looked at and dealt with the respect it deserves.

At the FPT meeting for seniors last week in Quebec City, we had a great start. Many of the provincial ministers talked about wanting to go with the program, to meet yearly, to work together cooperatively on issues that would make the lives of our seniors much better.

We work across departments such as housing. The Minister of Labour and Housing has been kind enough to work with us in a way that ensures that a portion of the affordable housing money will be put aside for low income seniors and the disabled, such as through RRAP, to ensure that seniors stay in their homes much longer so they can live in the communities they helped build.

We are working toward ensuring that many issues will come forward to ensure seniors have the access to affordable housing which the hon. member across the aisle asked about earlier today, such as rent supplements. As we know, if we take several of the ratings, whether it is the low income cut off point or the market basket group, whichever method one wants to use, we are trying to ensure that seniors reach this level so they are not living in poverty. We know seniors are living longer, healthier lives so we want to ensure they have the accommodations and extra dollars that will allow them to fully integrate in our society.

This brings us to the new horizons program. It will allow those organizations across the country that deal with seniors to find ways to reduce isolation, to include seniors who have contributed a great deal and who have so much more yet to contribute and to ensure that they are integrated, whether it is in our school systems with our young or mentoring society at large.

● (2125)

We know our seniors contribute more voluntary time, double the amount of others. We have to ensure that they are given the tools to continue to make our lives better together.

Of course there are many other issues that are extremely important to ensure our seniors can contribute in many ways to make our lives better.

We are talking to the minister responsible for CIDA about the Canada Corps and about the possibility of having our seniors participate in that program. On veterans' day sometimes our seniors go into schools and communicate with the children. They tell people of the sacrifices they made so we could live the freedom we so cherish.

We want to expand that. We want to find ways of working together with community groups. New horizons for seniors is a perfect vehicle for that.

There are many more issues about which we can continue to talk, whether it is the caregiving file or seniors who are disabled. We have to find ways to keep them in their homes, similar to Veterans Affairs which uses the home independence program.

We have to find ways that allow our seniors to create, as we did with the minister of housing with the garden suites or seniors flats. This allows seniors to have some company in their home if they so choose. With the money the government gives through the RRAP program, they can create that extra suite and extra source of income. It also creates the opportunity for a low income senior to possibly move in with a senior who has that extra room. It allows for both to have reasonable cost and reasonable revenue.

I think that is the creative approach about which the hon. member asked. She asked what were doing to ensure that we made the lives of our seniors better. Many more ideas will be coming forward. With the minister of housing, I am trying to see if a reverse mortgage will ever be introduced by CMHC for low income seniors. We are looking forward to the day it gives us some good news on that.

I think of the excitement we have within our caucus. Members continue communicating with us and giving us the information that they think will work. We challenge once again our hon. members across the aisle to come up with ideas. Together we can make the lives of seniors better, where they will not in any way live in poverty.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Chair, when we talk about caregivers, many of us know people across the country, many of our own constituents, who are dealing with elderly parents. Usually women have to leave their post of employment in order to take care of an elderly mother or father or someone who is seriously sick in the family.

I know governments have talked for a long time about that very issue. I recognized that we are into a new process in trying to meet these needs. Does the minister have anything to offer today as he continues his very important work on those issues?

Business of Supply

• (2130)

Hon. Tony Ianno: Mr. Chair, what is exciting is we are conducting round tables across the country. We hearing from professionals, from caregivers and from the care receivers. We are hearing a lot of ideas. We hope that in late September we will continue to crystallize where the vacuum is in order to achieve some relief for those who continue to make the lives of their loved ones better.

Aside from what we mentioned earlier, take into account the medical expense tax credit and the moneys that will eventually be there for home care. Of course respite care is extremely important to give people a break, especially the unpaid caregiver.

We have also launched in Social Development Canada an interactive web page that will allow caregivers to express their concerns and experiences. That way we can continue to enrich our ideas in a way that will make a difference in their lives.

In the first week alone there were 3,500 hits with personal experiences and suggestions. We encourage all Canadians to go to the Social Development Canada website and communicate with us if they cannot attend one of the other round table perspectives.

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Chair, I would like to say a couple of things on the child care file and then I have a couple of questions. One is on the clawback of the national child tax benefit supplement. Hopefully, if I still have time, I will have a question on housing.

My one critique of the government's roll out of the new child care funding is that so far it does not look like a national program. It is still very much a patchwork of agreements. Money hopefully will flow if the budget is passed, but there is no real framework that one could look at and say it is a national program. It is not like health care.

The government got off on the right foot with Manitoba and Saskatchewan in terms of their commitment to doing certain things. I was hoping that it would continue to follow that pattern as it went on to the other provinces and get them to buy into the same kind of promise of not for profit and community based child care. I think that will be best for families and children.

How is this a national program? If it is not, how does the minister propose to get there?

We have heard a number of comments from the Conservatives over the last number of months. First, suffice it to say we are not talking nanny state or babysitting here. That is simplistic at best to put that out.

We also need to recognize, and I think the minister would not disagree, that the work stay at home parents do and the contribution they make should be and needs to be valued. We need to find ways to do that. However, we should not have one off at the expense of another. We need to address the issue and look at financial breaks for them, especially for those in need. It is wrong to pit them over and against a quality child care system. That is disingenuous to do that.

As well, I want to do a quick critique of the argument that there should be some kind of a tax benefit scheme for stay at home parents

and the cost to the country to do that. I think the minister referenced that a bit.

Gordon Cleveland and Michael Krashinsky wrote a piece that I thought was rather informative. They said that the idea of paying stay at home parents at the centre of the Conservative child care policy did not make any financial sense. The \$2,000 tax deduction, about \$600 to \$800 per child, for a typical family ignores the reality that paying parents to stay at home is much more expensive. That is another way of putting what the Conservatives want to do.

If a large number take up the offer to stay at home, the social cost will be astronomical. We would have to pay them at least the rate of maternity and parental benefits, currently 55% of their regular pay, up to \$413 per week. Those benefits, which now cover the first year of a child's life, now cost about \$2.7 billion a year. That is just the beginning year. If we multiply that by six to cover all preschool years, it would cost us more than \$16 billion a year. I think we heard the number \$10 billion a while ago to do this. I agree with them on that. That is probably what we are talking about at the end of the day if we are going to have a national program and hit 1% of GDP invested in this.

Economists have said, Charlie Coffey in particular, that for every dollar invested, there is a two dollar return down the line in a good quality national child care program. We are talking about \$16 billion a year and we are not sure what the return on that would be, although there would be a return.

• (2135)

As I said a few minutes ago, I have no questions and no qualms with evaluating the contribution of stay at home parents and the excellent work they do bringing up their children; however, there is a cost.

Maternity and parental benefits cover only about 60% of all parents with newborns. It would cost \$27 billion per year plus the billions of dollars in lost production to cover all families, in addition to the cost of lost income of those families and the cost of the government's current and future lost tax revenues.

According to these economists, this would cost the economy about \$83 billion per year. If we were to add all that up, the cost of the Conservative proposal would be over \$100 billion a year. That is what we are talking about. That is the Tory proposal. If we go with what the Tories have suggested, that is what we are talking about here.

The new national child care program that we are envisioning is one that will benefit stay at home parents. It will offer them respite. Parents who want to plug in at different times convenient to their schedule will be able to do that. A readily accessible child care program in a community will benefit every family in that community and is only limited by one's imagination.

Business of Supply

Let me talk about the economics of child care spoken to very eloquently by Charles Coffey, vice president of the Royal Bank of Canada and just recently David Dodge, Governor of the Bank of Canada. For every dollar spent on child care there is a \$2 economic benefit through increased tax revenues and decreased social, education and health costs. Charles Coffey said:

A child's brain development in the first six years of life sets the foundation for lifelong learning, behaviour and health. High-quality early childhood education produces long-term positive outcomes and cost-savings that include improved school performance, reduced special education placement, lower school dropout rates, and increased lifelong earning potential. Not only does high-quality early childhood education make a difference for children, it matters to their employed parents. Employers increasingly find that the availability of good early childhood programs is critical to the recruitment and retention of parent employees. It's estimated that work-life conflicts cost Canadian organizations roughly \$2.7 billion in lost time due to work absences.

I guess we could add that to the Tory cost as well. David Dodge, Governor of the Bank of Canada, said:

While parents, along with some psychologists, sociologists and public health experts, have long intuitively understood the importance of ECD, it is really only over the last quarter century or so that scientists, physicians, and social scientists have come to recognize the crucial role played by ECD.

To sum up, the literature clearly shows that intervention to improve maternal and infant health, to support parenting, and to provide early childhood education is effective in improving readiness to learn at age six, thus raising the efficiency of primary schooling as a tool of human capital formation.

In the minister's view, what so far makes this a national program?

● (2140)

Hon. Ken Dryden: Mr. Chair, the way that talks have progressed with the provinces indicates a great similarity from one agreement to the other. Maybe 80%, maybe 90%, is the same from one province to another and then there are some differences in the rest of the agreements.

What I would have in mind for a national system is not unlike education. Education is a provincial jurisdiction and it is something that is framed. The authority for it is within the province. At the same time there are similarities across the country. There are certain expectations of an education system whether one is from B.C., P.E.I. or Newfoundland and Labrador. Even though there are differences, and those that would be in each system would see what those differences are and focus on those differences, someone from the outside looking in would see far more similarities than they would see differences.

That is likely the way in which early learning and child care will develop. There will be provincial differences and territorial differences, but there will be a common kind of understanding of what good regulated early learning and child care will look like across the country.

In terms of the math that he did and so on, as I mentioned before in terms of choices, every program that is presented is a choice. It is a choice in one direction and it is not quite a choice in some other direction. What the math revealed was that a \$2,000 tax deduction was not a child care choice. It was lots of other things but not a choice. It was a choice as a tax deduction. It offered a benefit as a tax deduction.

As a child care benefit, it was not. If it were, then of course all of those things that the member talked about would follow. If it were a

serious child care proposal, then the behaviour would be this and that and all of those things that he said that would affect the economy. It would affect all of these other things and would end up with the kinds of costs that he talked about.

However, it was not a serious child care proposal and it would not be acted upon seriously by parents. Therefore, it would not have the kind of implications that the member talked about.

In terms of the economics of child care and the comments of Charles Coffey and David Dodge, it is something that we have known all along. During all those years, 20 or 30 years ago, we talked about how important the formative years were for a child. We talked about how important the experience of entering school was for a child. We talked about how important it was in terms of the economic status and circumstances of a family, and what was available within that home for that child. What is all that saying to a great extent? It is about the learning environment and the development environment. It is about the interactions that take place during that time, whether they are stimulating or whether they are not stimulating.

Those are the things that we have always known. The challenge we face when our lives change, when the way in which our society changes, and the way in which we live changes, is how do we end up replicating as best as we can that kind of experience that we know is so important for the development of a child?

● (2145)

Our challenge is to create the right environment for those kids. How do we meet it now given that our life circumstances are different?

Mr. Tony Martin: Mr. Chair, has there been an analysis done on the clawback? That is a question I received from those living in poverty. How many people are working in an attempt to keep the supplement but not earning enough to qualify for welfare top up? How many disabled are unable to work and getting the supplement clawback?

How many people caring for a disabled child under the age of six are being clawed back? How many people caring for a baby under the age of one year are being clawed back? How many people living in a homeless shelter who are unable to find affordable housing are being clawed back? How many people are paying more than half their income on rent and how many of them are relying on food banks in order to feed their children? How many of them are losing the supplement?

I will leave the questions for the members opposite to decide who should answer. Is some of the money that is going out the door now for SCPI to be firmed up, so that there is some core funding for the people delivering on some of those challenging and important services?

Hon. Ken Dryden: Mr. Chair, those are things that we will have to check for the member. We do not have the answers for him. We are not sure whether there are answers to the questions, but we will look to see if we can find those answers.

Business of Supply

Hon. Tony Ianno: Mr. Chair, we are working with the minister and we do understand the issues of affordable housing on this side of the House. I was on the Anne Golden task force in Toronto regarding homelessness and of course caucus colleagues pushed very hard on that report to ensure that SCPI would be the result of all of our work.

A billion dollars toward transitional housing has been in place across the country and I believe also in the member's community. It has worked extremely well for many Canadians, who do not have the income, to allow them to have the home that they want. This has been a great step in my riding alone. Many transitional housing units have been built very successfully and there are more coming.

With the national housing agenda that is coming forward with \$600 million in the member's province of Ontario, it will go a long way to build affordable housing. The coop housing administration was passed over to the CHT. I think that has gone extremely well with the support of many members in the House.

There is a lot that is taking place in housing. As I mentioned earlier with the rent supplements, that will go to help low income persons who are on waiting lists in many regions. With the previous Conservative government in Ontario, I went up to see minister Hodgson at the time and of course he would have no part of affordable housing. However, we have persevered and now with a government that is more cooperative with us, we are looking forward to ensuring that all Canadians have the kind of housing of which they can be proud.

Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Chair, as chairman of the Subcommittee on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, I am pleased to preface my question to the minister with a few brief remarks.

A defining feature of our nation is our commitment to equality for all. Canadian citizenship is firmly anchored in the principle that every man, woman and child in Canada has a right to expect dignity, justice and fairness in every respect of their everyday lives. We believe everyone has the right to live, learn, work and play an active part in the community and enjoy the responsibilities and benefits of belonging.

The Government of Canada believes profoundly that all individuals should be able to participate in and contribute to society. That is why we work hard to equip Canadians with the tools, resources and opportunities they need to achieve their potential. It is why we make special efforts to ensure no one is left behind.

The people of my riding of Thunder Bay—Rainy River are extremely supportive of these goals. Our track record in advancing the inclusion of Canadians with disabilities reinforces that commitment. Canada was one of the first countries in the world to enshrine the rights of persons with disabilities in its Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

In the last 25 years the Government of Canada has taken significant steps, particularly in the areas of employment, income and taxation to help Canadians with disabilities overcome many barriers to inclusion. Direct program spending, tax measures, regulations, community support and of course the Canada pension plan disability program mark Canada as a global leader in supporting citizens with a disability, as well as their families.

More than one in five Canadians is affected by a disability. Some 3.6 million Canadians have a disability, while another 2.8 million act as caregivers to family members and friends with a disability or a long term health condition. As our population ages, these numbers will grow significantly since the incidence of disabilities increases in later life. Ensuring the full inclusion of Canadians with disabilities and their families is not only a socially laudable goal but increasingly an economic imperative.

Recognizing this, the Government of Canada has worked in unison with provincial and territorial governments, the voluntary and private sectors, and individual Canadians to build a comprehensive, long term strategy to fully include Canadians with disabilities in all facets of society. Strong federal-provincial-territorial relations have been the pillars of this progress, particularly in increasing employment, income and disability supports for persons with disabilities.

Canada's ministers responsible for social services continue to focus on disability as a collective priority. For its part, the Government of Canada is taking steps to ensure the full participation of people with disabilities within the federal public service. There are government-wide policies in place to create inclusive barrier-free environments.

Our goals are and have been strongly supported by the work of parliamentarians who have played a key role in enhancing the government's understanding of disability issues and informing next steps. Parliamentarians are the front line contacts and liaison between the government and the disabled communities. They are the vital advocates bringing forward the difficulties that their constituents experience. Through the work of committees, members of Parliament also help to identify solutions to these problems and work to overcome obstacles that limit the contributions of Canadians with disabilities to their communities.

In particular, the efforts and research of the Subcommittee on the Status of Persons with Disabilities have provided a venue that enables members of disabled communities and stakeholders to tell government what is working, what is not, and how things can be improved. This role is crucial to developing strong policies and programs.

● (2150)

It is largely due to past recommendations of the Subcommittee on the Status of Persons With Disabilities that the government is actively engaged in such initiatives as simplifying the application process for the Canada pension plan disability benefit; implementing automatic reinstatement whereby CPP disability beneficiaries who leave benefits to return to work can request to have their benefits restarted if they are unable to continue working due to a recurrence of their disability within two years; and improving the income tax benefits and applications processes for persons with disabilities.

Previous work and recommendations dating from 1996 by the federal task force on disability issues have also been pivotal in guiding Government of Canada actions, with the majority of its recommendations adopted in areas such as employment and community supports. Past task force advice has been vital to furthering advancements on disability issues, including the development of the pivotal federal, provincial and territorial policy framework outlined in the text "In unison" in 1998, on which we continue to base our policy approaches.

New funds and new programs resulting from these efforts have meant new opportunities for Canadians with disabilities. Individuals and their families, students, entrepreneurs, athletes and disability organizations have all benefited from these new opportunities over the past few years. These gains show tremendous progress and the great many things that parliamentarians, the Government of Canada, disability organizations and most important, persons with disabilities can achieve when we work collaboratively to improve life opportunities.

While we are making headway, there is still a long way to go to ensuring the full inclusion and equality of people with disabilities.

People of my riding of Thunder Bay—Rainy River and indeed all Canadians realize that in order to achieve full inclusion and equality, we need to remove the remaining barriers that prevent persons with disabilities from enjoying realities others take for granted. We need to ensure that the gains we have made do not make us complacent.

There are many issues remaining to be addressed. Individuals with disabilities remain among the poorest members of society. Far too many continue to face transportation, accommodation, education, employment and attitudinal barriers that prevent them from achieving their full potential. That is unacceptable to the Government of Canada and indeed to all Canadians. We certainly can and must do better.

This is not something the federal government can achieve alone, nor would it be a wise approach. No single sector has all the right answers, nor does it have the necessary resources. We need the input and support of a broad range of partners, provinces and territories, disability organizations, municipalities, communities and the voluntary and corporate sectors to move this agenda forward.

Meeting this collective challenge is essential, not only because it is the right thing to do but also because it is key to addressing many other social and economic issues. Success in addressing poverty, homelessness, economic growth, livable cities, quality health care, violence and crime, child care, strengthening aboriginal communities and seniors issues all require to a great extent the inclusion of people with disabilities.

In an aging society, renewed and concerted action on disabilities is crucial to Canada's future well-being. What is required is a policy and program approach that is citizen centred, flexible, inclusive and clearly set within a social development framework. All federal government agencies and all orders of government need to incorporate disability issues into their policy and program planning. We cannot just look at what we do under a disability banner, but rather, how we bring disability issues into all the files dominating the public agenda. This is the key to inclusion.

Business of Supply

Action in this area must not only be a government-wide but a nation-wide priority. Revitalizing our initiatives targeted to Canadians with disabilities will require building public momentum and doing a better job of reaching out to all potential partners so that we can move simultaneously on several parallel fronts.

• (2155)

To do this the Government of Canada, working in partnership with the provinces and territories and the disabled community, has embarked on a process to develop a 10 year plan of action. Work is under way to refocus our efforts to foster stronger linkages with other policy priorities and to develop more effective policy and program responses that will increase the inclusion of Canadians with disabilities within the decade. This work is far from complete. We are seeking ideas and innovations from all quarters as we take on this vitally important task.

I congratulate the minister on his personal commitment to making the issues of the disabled front of mind in his department and in cabinet. Given the significance of this issue to economic growth and social cohesion, I would ask the minister to outline some of the steps he believes need to be taken to continue advancing this agenda.

• (2200)

Hon. Ken Dryden: Mr. Chair, I would like to thank the hon. member very much for laying out the circumstances and challenges so well. I know this particular area of persons with disabilities is a priority for him from the work he did formerly as the mayor of Thunder Bay and the work he continues to do in the House.

About 20 years ago the effect of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to a great extent was to remind us of the rights of everybody and to also remind us of those who are discriminated against. Twenty years ago and more, most people with disabilities lived out of sight and out of mind. The Charter of Rights and Freedoms helped to move people from out of mind to in mind. What we need to do is to move people with disabilities from back of mind to front of mind in all of the things we do.

The first step is to build on strong foundations. It will mean working closely, as the hon. member mentioned, with provincial and territorial partners and focusing our existing federal-provincial-territorial processes and relations on developing key elements of that 10 year action plan. It will mean making even stronger links with people in the disabled community and making them real partners in developing a plan.

We will also work to address what is generally recognized as a very serious deficiency, the lack of widespread access to technical aids and devices, personal assistive services and other such supports.

Business of Supply

It will be critical to explore innovative improvements to the employment and income situation of persons with disabilities, particularly with regard to developing corporate employer strategies. It will be important to make it clear that disability is a core social issue which plays out on so many policy fronts: poverty, employment, learning, housing and transportation, to name just a few. As a consequence it means making disability a Government of Canada issue, one which all federal departments and agencies make a core priority.

I am also committed to work with my colleagues to establish the Government of Canada more and more as a model employer for persons with disabilities and in helping to ensure that high quality service is provided to persons with disabilities.

It is essential that we move forward on developing a broader and deeper public understanding of the growing significance and relevance of disability issues to all Canadians.

We as a country must be prepared to address the looming demographic reality of an aging population. Science and medicine are making it possible for more and more people of all ages to live longer with a disability and to live more productively, rewardingly, satisfyingly and inclusively with that disability.

Mr. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Mr. Chair, I will be splitting my time this evening with the member for Nepean—Carleton.

I want to jump to some questions for the minister. I want to talk to him specifically about certain forms of discrimination that maybe he has not taken into account in his bureaucratic babysitting program. These hastily announced spending initiatives do not take into account the needs of rural based families. Most of the money, actually I think all of the money, is going to urban based institutionalized day care. Rural families, who count on informal and seasonal day care arrangements and who do not have access to urban programs, are left out of this.

Could the minister tell me why he is creating a system that provides rural parents with no support for their own child care choices?

• (2205)

Hon. Ken Dryden: First of all, Mr. Chair, that is incorrect. As recently as about two weeks ago we made our announcement in Newfoundland. We made it outside Gander in the village of Glenwood, which has a child care centre.

This whole program is focused on providing service and possibility for children wherever they reside. It means that in smaller places it is more of a challenge, but just as with education, one does not stop attempting to meet that challenge. One works that much harder to try to provide the answer for rural communities as well as urban communities.

There has never been an approach that is particularly urban about this. There has not been and there will not be. This is an early learning and child care system for across the country. "Across the country" means big places and it means small places.

Mr. Andrew Scheer: He may have brought a press conference to a small town, Mr. Chair, but he is certainly not providing any sort of

support for rural parents across the country for their own child care choices.

There is a statistic out there which says that less than 10% of parents in Saskatchewan choose to send their children to institutional day care. Right now they are choosing to use other forms: family based day care, neighbourhood nannies or faith based day care. Why does the minister want the 90% of parents who do not want to send their children to a bureaucratic system to have to pay twice, once for their preferred choice and once for the scheme that the minister wants to impose on them?

This is not about choosing ice cream flavours. It is about choosing what is best for their own children. We know the statistics show that the vast majority of Canadian parents want the ability to provide their own forms of day care and have their own preferred choice, not the one size fits all program that the minister is imposing.

Hon. Ken Dryden: Mr. Chair, most of the question that was asked has been answered several times earlier in the evening for others who were here. The point is just wrong. One need only to have been present for the child care announcement in Regina to see the reaction of those in the room and to see the reaction of the minister and the premier and hear them talk about how important all of this will be to early learning and child care in the province.

I do not know the exact numbers in terms of what the money will represent to Saskatchewan, but it will mean something close to double what it is they spend up to now in terms of early learning and child care. It will be pretty much doubling what they do right now. That is the kind of possibility and impact that this will have for the whole province of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Chair, I would like to make sure I understand that. He does not know where the money is going, but he knows he doubled it and therefore it must be a good thing. That is such a typical Liberal attitude toward things. If there is a problem, the Liberals throw money at it. If the problem is still there, they throw more money at it.

It is not the money we are talking about. I am sure the bureaucrats in the room and the provincial premier from the socialist party were very happy about it. I am talking about the parents who choose other forms of day care. I am not talking about bureaucrats in the department but parents who have children and are facing that challenge themselves. Where is the choice for them?

Why are they being asked to support both the minister's scheme and their own choice when they feel the minister's scheme does not address their own particular needs or that they can best provide the service themselves and can better educate their children themselves or perhaps through a family member or a member of a faith based group or a community association? Where do they fit into this one size fits all approach?

Hon. Ken Dryden: Mr. Chair, all the people the hon. member mentioned still have all of those options. One of the options that they do not have very much of now, which is the real shame of it, is regulated care. They do not have the option of high quality care. They do not have the option of inclusive care. They do not have nearly to the extent they would like the availability of affordable care.

Business of Supply

What we are looking to do is provide real choice, real choice where somebody can decide on the forms of child care that the hon. member is suggesting. That is absolutely fine. The parents can still do that. What we are looking to do is also offer them the possibility of something which is that much more developmental, of that much higher a quality and that much more affordable.

● (2210)

Mr. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Chair, I have heard a lot of insulting things in my short time here, but I have never heard something quite that insulting. Is the minister saying that parents who choose to raise their children themselves and provide that early learning themselves do not provide quality care? Is he saying that family members or faith based groups or neighbourhood associations that provide that early learning and child care do not provide quality care?

Do they need to have some certificate from the minister to be able to provide early learning? Are stay at home parents who choose to teach their own children inferior to a bureaucratic scheme dreamed up by this minister? That is unbelievable.

I challenge the minister to talk to the thousands of people who have contacted my office and who provide that early learning childhood care to their own children or their neighbour's children. I challenge the minister to tell them that they do not provide high quality care and to tell them that their level of care is inferior to that of bureaucrats in the minister's office.

Hon. Ken Dryden: Mr. Chair, the hon. member has talked about his short experience within the House. One of the things that is so remarkable about that same short experience in the House is how somebody in the House is able, apparently, to say whatever it is he says one has said even if one did not say it. If they repeat it with words which suggest that kind of outrage, in fact, somehow it is as if one has said it. Of course it was never said. It was never said and never will be said because it is not believed.

Again, all one can say is that if the hon. member had been here earlier he would have heard how in fact, as all of us know, that central relationship, the central source of development and learning in any child's life, is that with the parent. The question is in terms of today's life where in fact the great majority of parents are both in the workplace and have their children in care of some form or another. The question is, what kind of care? What are the options? What are the choices?

What is offered by our program of \$5 billion over five years on the way to the creation of a system is something that is of higher quality than the kind of day care that is offered in general now. There are a lot of good places, but in general the intent is to raise the level of that system and raise the level of the experience of those children.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC): Mr. Chair, let us be honest. What the minister is talking about is a \$10 billion to \$12 billion day care bureaucracy, which will mean higher taxes for families and few choices for parents.

The minister is not being honest about the full cost of his program. In fact, all the groups that support this day care bureaucracy say that it will cost in the neighbourhood of \$10 billion to \$12 billion.

The New Democratic Party has said in this House of Commons, and this is the party that wrote the latest budget, that it will cost at least \$10 billion.

The major groups that have researched and support the minister's day care bureaucracy say it will cost \$10 billion to \$12 billion.

Yet he is trying to convince the Canadian people that it will only cost \$1 billion per year. Why is the minister hiding approximately \$10 billion in real costs to taxpayers for his program?

Hon. Ken Dryden: Mr. Chair, what I have said consistently from the beginning is that the promise made in the campaign last year was for \$5 billion over five years in order to help build an early learning and child care system. It was never expected that \$5 billion over five years would end up being able to create an early learning and child care system.

As I have said repeatedly, as the hon. member would know, in terms of the way in which a health care system is created or an education system is created, at any particular moment when those are in their formative stages we do not know what our ambitions, desires and hopes are going to be for that education or health care system.

Nobody would have guessed a hundred years ago that our education system would be something wherein it is understood that high school graduation is basically for everybody, or that there would be colleges or universities of the numbers and dimensions that exist. Forty years ago, nobody would have believed us about a health care system with the kind of ambition that we have.

What happened over time is that people decided for themselves what was important and what was not. In the future, people will decide how important early learning and child care is for them.

● (2215)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Chair, I trust the minister's next answer will be commensurate with the time it takes to ask the question. How much will it cost to fully implement his national day care bureaucracy? How much will it cost per year to fully implement that program?

Hon. Ken Dryden: Mr. Chair, the answer is that no one can know, just as no one could know the cost of building a health care system, just as no one could know the cost of building an education system. Those are things that people in the future will decide for themselves, knowing all that they will know in the future, all of what their ambitions are. They will make that decision for themselves.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Chair, the truth is that the minister is hiding the true cost because he does not want to admit that this is going to cost \$10 billion to \$12 billion.

I will give him one last chance. He obviously has studied this issue. I imagine he has people working on it. How can we imagine that he would move in favour of a program of this enormity without having any knowledge of the entire costs to implement it?

Business of Supply

The taxpayers of this country have a right to know what will be the cost to fully implement this massive new day care bureaucracy. I am giving him one last chance. His last answer was, "I don't know". That is a \$10 billion "I do not know". I am giving him one more chance to come clean and be honest with the Canadian taxpayers. How much will it cost?

Hon. Ken Dryden: Mr. Chair, the answer is the same no matter how many times the hon. member asks the question, just as 100 years ago no one would have known the cost of an education system, no one would have known the cost of a health care system. It is up to people to decide at any particular moment what their priorities are, what they are willing to spend. If they only want to spend \$1 billion on early learning and child care five years from now, that is their choice. If they want to spend more, that is their choice.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Chair, we just extracted quite a stunning admission from the minister at this late hour. He has admitted that he has no idea of the full cost of implementing the program he sets out. It reminds us of the gun registry. It was supposed to cost a net \$2 million. It cost a thousand times more than that, \$2 billion to Canadian taxpayers. This program in its sheer enormity could have cost overruns that are far beyond the imagination considering that his department and his office have apparently not done the research to ascertain what it might cost three, four or five years down the road.

He said that he does not even know what it will cost. Taxpayers know that a \$10 billion or \$12 billion new bureaucracy will cost a lot to them. It will mean fewer dollars to make child care decisions in their homes. His program fails to provide new choices to stay at home parents or parents who use a family member or a neighbourhood based system of child care. Not only does his program fail to provide those choices, it actually takes more choices away by imposing new costs on taxpayers. Those costs will surely mean fewer dollars in the pockets of parents with which to make those choices. Not only is he failing to provide choices, he is taking choices away.

My question is very simple. This program is going to cost \$10 billion to \$12 billion. How will he pay for it? Will he cut health care? Will he increase taxes? Or will he run a deficit?

• (2220)

Hon. Ken Dryden: Mr. Chair, clearly the hon. member has no sense of history at all, no sense of understanding of how a society works, no sense of understanding in terms of people's choices and what people are willing to do over time. He has no sense of history whatsoever. That is the reason one cannot answer that question, but at the same time, one does not need to answer that question because the choices will be made later.

The citizens can make their choice at any moment, three years from now or five years from now. They can decide. One has to trust the future. One has to trust people in the future. Those parents of the future might even know more than the parents of the present because they will have had five years more of learning and experience with it.

Ms. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Chair, at this late hour I am pleased to speak to this important series of estimates of a department that has significant responsibilities in the government.

It has been said that the true measure of a civilization rests upon how it cares for its vulnerable members and, by any measure, Canadians care deeply about the welfare of our fellow citizens. We understand that if we want to build strong communities, a healthy population, a dynamic economy and a more equitable society, we have to ensure Canadians have the tools and financial resources they need to achieve their full potential. We know that in supporting the disadvantaged and reducing poverty we strengthen society as a whole.

It would be hard to find a community within each of our jurisdictions that has not been touched by poverty. Poverty affects Canadians of all ages and from all parts of this country. Federal investments in people have improved and are improving standards of living. As a government, we continue to find new ways to support community driven efforts to address poverty.

For children, not being raised in poverty can mean better health, better educational opportunities, secure shelter and an overall better start to a life in which their potential at any next stage of their life can be more fully realized.

For seniors, an adequate income can contribute to a life not much different than that lived before they were seniors, a life of purpose and engagement, of contribution to family and community, and most important, one of dignity.

For people with disabilities, for aboriginal Canadians and for other vulnerable groups, escaping poverty can mean a fuller and more complete life lived.

As a result of the complex and often dynamic nature of poverty, we know that no one policy or program can respond to all the different circumstances of individuals, families and communities. We know, for example, that having a job does not necessarily mean a route out of poverty for indeed there is a significant population of working poor in Canada.

Addressing poverty requires that the federal government work with our partners, other governments, the business and voluntary sectors, communities and citizens through an integrated set of policies. This is the approach taken by the Government of Canada.

It rests on three main policy pillars: first, providing income support to families in need; second, supporting the labour market integration of working age individuals; and third, delivering benefits and services to address particular circumstances faced by some individuals, their families and their communities. Let me give the House a few examples.

A key element of our approach in tackling poverty among children is the national child benefit. A collaborative initiative between federal, provincial and territorial governments, the national child benefit, an important platform, provides income supports, programs and services for low income families with children regardless of whether the parents are in the workforce or on social assistance.

Business of Supply

By 2007-08, the child benefits paid by the Government of Canada are projected to reach \$10 billion a year. As a result, a low income family with two children will receive an annual maximum of \$6,259 in child benefits.

For their part, provinces, territories and first nations reinvest a further \$764.2 million in complementary benefits and services for low income families with children. These include child benefits and earned income supplements, child day care initiatives, early childhood services and children at risk services, youth initiatives and supplementary health benefits.

In April 2005, federal, provincial and territorial governments released their fifth progress report under the national child benefit showing that government investments for low income families continue to increase.

● (2225)

Further, the soon to be released joint evaluation of the national child benefit reinforces that it is making progress on all three of its goals: first, reducing the incidence and depth of poverty; second, promoting parents' labour force attachment by ensuring that families are better off as a result of working; and third, reducing administrative overlap.

In addition to income support, the government recognizes that other services are needed to support children from low income families. We know that good quality, affordable child care, which has certainly been the discussion of the evening, not only promotes healthy child development but is also a key factor and an important factor in a parent's ability to work.

To increase the quality of and access to child care for Canadian families, in budget 2005 the government committed \$5 billion over five years to start building a system of early learning and child care in every province and territory. To date, signed agreements in principle with five provinces have been developed, the first one, I am proud to say, in the province of Manitoba.

Through the Understanding the Early Years initiative, the government supports work that helps communities understand how their young children are faring and how the provision of local services can help or hinder a child's progress. With UEY, funds are provided to support community learning and mobilization to help make children ready to learn when they enter the formal school system.

Moving from young people to the less young, Canada has a tradition of reducing poverty rates among seniors. A generation ago we introduced public pensions and old age security for our then most vulnerable citizens. Through the Canada pension plan, old age security and the guaranteed income supplement, approximately \$50 billion annually is paid out in direct income support to senior Canadians.

To further improve the situation of low income seniors who remain vulnerable, the 2005 budget announced increases to the guaranteed income supplement for low income seniors which will raise the GIS payments by \$2.7 billion over five years.

In the last 25 years, the Government of Canada has also taken significant steps, particularly in the area of employment income and

taxation, to help persons with disabilities overcome low income and other barriers to inclusion. One important example is the multilateral framework for labour market agreements for persons with disability through which the government invests \$223 million annually in provincial and territorial programs to help those who are disabled. Another is the child disability benefit which helps low and modest income families with the additional costs they incur in raising a child with a disability.

Important for the city of Winnipeg, which where I am from, budget 2004 announced the doubling of funding for the urban aboriginal strategy to \$50 million so that more communities can provide programs that address the challenges and priorities of aboriginal people living off the reserve, and to provide coherence and congruency so that departments speak to each other and jurisdictions cooperate.

Through the aboriginal human resource development agreements, which is another important initiative for my city, the Government of Canada provides funding of \$1.6 billion over five years to enable aboriginal organizations to design and deliver employment programs and services.

Budget 2005 also announced \$398 million over five years to help newcomers better integrate into Canada.

The government also delivers benefits and services to address the challenges faced by individuals and their families at the greatest risk of exclusion. The Government of Canada has committed \$1.1 billion for the affordable housing initiative which works in partnership with provinces and territories. As well, the government has committed more than \$500 million for housing renovation programs to help low income housing residents with critical repair needs.

The national homelessness initiative has received over \$1 billion in funding to support community driven solutions to help alleviate homelessness.

● (2230)

In addition, community based efforts, such as those focused on Canada's social economy, are playing an important part.

Finally, we know that the key to any solution to poverty is an economy that creates jobs supported by a skilled workforce. Therefore as a government we are continuing to foster a climate of economic help that extends to all citizens.

How effective has this approach been? There can be no debate that measurable progress has indeed been made. Take the example of our seniors. In 1980, 21.3% of Canadian seniors were below Statistics Canada's after tax low income cut-off. By 2003 the number had fallen to 6.8%.

Business of Supply

Experts have confirmed that this substantial drop can be largely attributed to the maturation of our public retirement income system.

Low income rates for Canada's children have also fallen from 18.6% in 1996 to 12.4% in 2003. The national child benefit has played a significant role in this trend. Rising federal investment levels mean the national child benefit will continue to help prevent and reduce child poverty. The \$5 billion over five years committed by the Government of Canada for early learning and child care should also provide a substantial benefit in the development of our children.

Much has and is being done. However, in spite of all this, there is no question that much more remains to be done. Not all Canadians have benefited to the same extent and significant poverty related challenges remain.

Given the importance of this issue in supporting the social and economic inclusion of Canadians, I would like the Minister of Social Development Canada to give us his views on how the Government of Canada should move forward to further address the challenges faced by low income Canadians.

Hon. Ken Dryden: Mr. Chair, as I said earlier, as Canadians we have certain understandings about what it is to be Canadian, what we expect of and for ourselves and what we expect of and for others. We expect the opportunity of a full and rewarding life, but for some that does not happen easily. We can do more for families and children, for persons with disabilities and our most vulnerable seniors, for aboriginal Canadians and for recent immigrants.

Despite the economic gains we have made over the last decade, many of our fellow Canadians remain in need. Many, whether holding a full time job or never able to work at all, struggle to make ends meet every day, so where can we go from here?

Almost 10 years ago our nation came to an important consensus that helping families with children was a top priority, and from that consensus of government, citizens, communities and businesses alike was born the national child benefit, what has been described as the most important development in social policy since medicare.

Every year we provide income support to help 2.7 million Canadians and 1.5 million Canadian families, yet even with the NCB, even as we continue to put in place the conditions necessary to improve a child's standard of living and their readiness to learn and develop, to provide safe and strong communities, affordable housing, a sustainable and responsive health care system, and jobs

and income supports for their parents, too many children live in low income circumstances.

This spring, federal, provincial and territorial ministers responsible for social services have released or will release three key documents with respect to the national child benefit. In April it was progress report 2003. In the coming days we will be releasing the summary report of the first evaluation of the national child benefit. In June we will release the latest NCB impact analysis. Together, these documents will provide a good indication of the progress we are making in addressing child poverty.

A recent UNICEF report, entitled "Child Poverty in Rich Countries", pointed out that many European nations began their increased individual attention on poverty generally by building a consensus among citizens, communities, the business and voluntary sectors and politicians to determine just what poverty is and how it should be measured. Only then, they realized, could they set up understandable and accepted targets, and only with targets could they generate the necessary focus and will that might generate the right results.

In Canada we have a host of measures for low income that are used too selectively and often opportunistically by governments, advocacy groups and academics, depending on the message each wants to deliver. Collectively, these measures make relative success or failure less clear. They make accountability easier to avoid.

Social Development Canada is at the forefront of Canadian social policy. I want to generate a discussion with governments, communities, the business and voluntary sectors and with the public in general about poverty, about how it is best understood and measured, about what priorities we should have and about what targets we should set. I look forward to initiating this discussion in the near future.

● (2235)

The Deputy Chair: It being 10:36 p.m. all votes are deemed reported pursuant to Standing Order 81(4).

(All Human Resources Development (Social Development) votes reported).

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): The House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24 (1).

(The House adjourned at 10:37 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Tuesday, May 31, 2005

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Business of Supply

Human Resources Development (Social Development) — Main Estimates 2005-06

(House in committee of the whole for consideration of all votes under Human Resources Development (Social Development) in the Main Estimates, Mr. Strahl in the chair.)

Mrs. Skelton	6443
Mr. Dryden	6444
Ms. Guergis	6444
Mr. Ianno	6445
Mr. Dryden	6445
Ms. Gagnon (Québec)	6448
Mr. Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)	6450
Mr. Savage	6452
Mr. Ianno	6453
Ms. Ambrose	6454

Mr. Devolin	6455
Ms. Bakopanos	6456
Mr. Gagnon (Saint-Maurice—Champlain)	6458
Ms. Minna	6459
Mr. Watson	6462
Ms. Oda	6463
Ms. Sgro	6464
Mr. Ianno	6464
Ms. Sgro	6465
Mr. Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)	6466
Mr. Boshcoff	6468
Mr. Scheer	6470
Mr. Poilievre	6471
Ms. Neville	6472
(All Human Resources Development (Social Development) votes reported)	6474

MAIL  POSTE

Canada Post Corporation / Société canadienne des postes

Postage paid

Port payé

Lettermail

Poste-lettre

**1782711
Ottawa**

If undelivered, return COVER ONLY to:

Publishing and Depository Services

PWGSC, Ottawa, ON K1A 0S5

Internet: <http://publications.gc.ca>

1-800-635-7943 or Local 613-941-5995

En cas de non-livraison,

retourner cette COUVERTURE SEULEMENT à :

Les Éditions et Services de dépôt

TPSGC, Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0S5

Internet: <http://publications.gc.ca>

1-800-635-7943 ou appel local (613) 941-5995

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

Also available on the Parliamentary Internet Parlementaire at the following address:

Aussi disponible sur le réseau électronique « Parliamentary Internet Parlementaire » à l'adresse suivante :

<http://www.parl.gc.ca>

The Speaker of the House hereby grants permission to reproduce this document, in whole or in part, for use in schools and for other purposes such as private study, research, criticism, review or newspaper summary. Any commercial or other use or reproduction of this publication requires the express prior written authorization of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Additional copies may be obtained from Publishing and Depository Services, PWGSC, Ottawa, ON K1A 0S5

Le Président de la Chambre des communes accorde, par la présente, l'autorisation de reproduire la totalité ou une partie de ce document à des fins éducatives et à des fins d'étude privée, de recherche, de critique, de compte rendu ou en vue d'en préparer un résumé de journal. Toute reproduction de ce document à des fins commerciales ou autres nécessite l'obtention au préalable d'une autorisation écrite du Président.

On peut obtenir des copies supplémentaires en écrivant à : Les Éditions et Services de dépôt, TPSGC, Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0S5

**On peut obtenir la version française de cette publication en écrivant à : Les Éditions et Services de dépôt
TPSGC, Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0S5**