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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Monday, November 28, 2005

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

CONTENTS

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

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, November 28, 2005

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1105)

[*Translation*]

CRIMINAL CODE

(Bill S-19. On the Order: Private Members' Business:)

September 28, 2005—Member for Gatineau—Second reading and reference to Standing Committee on Justice, Human Rights, Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness of Bill S-19, an act to amend the Criminal code (criminal interest rate).

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Gatineau is not present to move the motion as announced in today's order paper. Accordingly, the order will be dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

[*English*]

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

The Speaker: The sitting will be suspended until 12 noon.
(The sitting of the House was suspended at 11:05 a.m.)

SITTING RESUMED

(The House resumed at 12 p.m.)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1200)

[*English*]

TRANSPORTATION AMENDMENT ACT

Hon. Raymond Chan (for the Minister of Transport) moved that Bill C-44, An Act to amend the Canada Transportation Act and the Railway Safety Act, to enact the VIA Rail Canada Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Hon. Charles Hubbard (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased

today to lead off debate on second reading of Bill C-44, which makes a significant number of amendments to transportation regulations and policies in our country.

Today I would like to concentrate mainly on the air transportation provisions in support of the proposed amendments to the Canada Transportation Act.

Air transportation is an essential tool connecting Canadians to each other and the world. Canada's air industry contributes immensely to the growth and prosperity enjoyed by Canadians, providing an economic engine that supports aspects of economic development in all sectors of our society and is an essential component to the success of Canada's trade agenda.

As the House is aware, the federal government's role in air policy has changed dramatically since 1988 when the domestic air industry was deregulated. The objective of deregulation was to allow market forces rather than the government to dictate the supply and price of air services in the domestic market. At the same time, the Government of Canada implemented and maintained strict controls to ensure appropriate oversight and consumer protection.

In the Speech from the Throne, the Government of Canada committed to provide businesses in Canada with smart government. By this we mean providing an up to date legislative framework consisting of "a transparent and predictable regulatory system that accomplishes public policy objectives efficiently while eliminating unintended impacts".

In the spirit of this commitment to smart government, the objectives of the proposed air transportation amendments are threefold: technical housekeeping; improved clarity and efficiency; and above all, consumer protection.

In general, the proposed amendments include provisions that would clarify the intent of the legislation to facilitate the regulatory functions of the Canadian Transportation Agency to respond to changes in Canada's air transportation marketplace and to ensure consistency in the application of the agency's regulatory powers.

I will now speak directly to the proposed measures that would further protect Canadian consumers.

In 2000, when Air Canada acquired Canadian Airlines, it served close to 80% of the domestic scheduled air services market. The Government of Canada took a number of measures at that time to protect consumers from potential abuses and to foster a competitive air industry market that was open to new entrants.

Government Orders

Although these temporary measures were effective during the transition period of the air industry in the last few years, they are no longer necessary in the current reality of Canada's domestic air market. The proposed amendments would return the agency to its traditional well-established regulatory and complaints-based function and structure in place prior to 2000.

Today Air Canada remains Canada's largest and dominant air carrier with over 50% of the market. Canada now boasts, however, several national, regional and charter airlines such as WestJet, CanJet, First Air, Air North, and Air Transat, which provide increased competition and consumer choice in all areas of the country from coast to coast and beyond.

The proposed amendments aim to continue to allow market forces to do their work, and airlines, both new and expanding, to make their decisions based on private sector commercial realities, free of unnecessary or impeding legislation. We intend to stay the course of deregulation, which means letting air industries thrive and, unfortunately, sometimes falter on the merits of the business choices they make.

As the House may recall, in 2000 the Office of the Air Travel Complaints Commissioner was created to review complaints and attempt to resolve the matters by acting as a facilitator or arranging for formal mediation of the complaint. The commissioner served a useful function in addressing complaints of potential consumer abuses by a dominant Air Canada and in determining whether complaints should be handled by the agency where the matter related to its exclusive jurisdiction.

● (1205)

Over the past few years, changing market dynamics and the erosion of Air Canada's market dominance by low cost carriers has resulted in a reduction of the number of complaints targeted specifically toward Air Canada. Today, the complaints are distributed more proportionately across Canada's air carriers and relate mainly to regulatory matters falling within the ongoing jurisdiction of the agency.

Our proposed amendments would eliminate the position and office of the commissioner and would make permanent and transparent the complaints resolution function of the agency by integrating this function into the regular operations of the agency. I want to stress that the complaints resolution function and the agency's ability to respond to these complaints remain intact.

I should note that with the recent implementation of the air traffic complaints program, the agency has demonstrated that it continues to respond to travellers' complaints in an informal manner and consistent with its ongoing mandate. In fact, proposed amendments to the legislation would ensure that the agency will continue to have the flexibility to address consumer complaints more efficiently through the existing informal process in place or through the formal quasi-judicial process employed by the agency itself.

This amendment would also allow a more strategic and efficient use of our resources. This is consistent with how complaints are addressed in other modes of transportation in Canada and puts air operators on the same level playing field with these competing transportation modes.

Consumer protection was a major objective of the Government of Canada following Air Canada's acquisition of Canadian in 2000 and it remains so today. Consumers have told us that in the area of airline advertising there remains, however, significant room for improvement. Consumers want clear, transparent advertising that is not misleading. They want to be able to compare different airlines' advertising pricing and to know up front how much they will pay for air services.

Price advertisements prepared by air carriers, either in newspapers, on Internet sites or elsewhere, do not always contain complete or clear pricing information. Often the prices that are advertised are only a fraction of the total cost of the travel, leading to sticker shock when the consumer finds out the final price.

Typical advertised air fares exclude air navigation service costs, other business costs to the airline for provision of air services, and all of these, we feel, should be included with the advertised price. Therefore, the advertised air fares must include surcharges, taxes and any other fees that airlines collect from individual passengers on behalf of others.

While consumers are alerted to the existence of additional airline surcharges and other fees and charges in the small print, travellers often cannot always determine the total price of the ticket until they finalize a purchase.

Other countries, such as the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia, have instituted similar regimes to ensure that consumers have sufficient pricing information. Some provinces, such as Quebec and Ontario, require transparent advertising of air travel by travel agents and other provincially regulated operators. Consumers, we believe, want a similar level of transparency for advertising by airlines throughout the country.

The proposed amendments provide air operators with clear directions in line with consumer expectations and will give the agency the authority to regulate and enforce mandatory standards for transparency in advertising in all media. This will ensure that those standards are consistently applied across the country throughout the industry by all domestic and foreign carriers and their agents for flights operating within or originating in Canada.

This clearly will provide consumers with the ability to readily determine and compare the final price for air travel when making their travel plans and will allow consumers to differentiate between costs being charged by the airline and those levelled by governments and airport authorities for other services provided.

In addition, consumers are entitled to know the terms and conditions of the air service before they book a flight. These terms and conditions contain valuable information for travellers on the air carrier's policy regarding matters such as the carriage of persons with disabilities, how passengers would be compensated for denial of boarding on overbooked flights, what the air carrier will do for passengers should a flight be cancelled or delayed, and under what conditions a consumer could expect a refund or credit for a flight that a consumer cancelled or re-booked.

Government Orders

●(1210)

The proposed amendments would take the current consumer protection provision one step further by requiring all commercial air operators, both domestic and foreign carriers operating services in Canada, to prominently display their terms of carriage at their business offices and on any Internet site from which they sell those services. These proposed amendments would ensure that when consumers made travel arrangements, they would be informed of their rights and the obligations of the air carrier for flights offered.

In conclusion, the proposed amendments continue the Government of Canada's move to a liberalized and open air transportation system in Canada, one which balances the need to update statutory and regulatory instruments to protect and to respond to changes in the air industry marketplace with a responsibility to ensure that consumers are protected in a manner that is consistent with a fully deregulated market.

We firmly believe that these changes to the Canada Transportation Act are warranted, will give the Canadian Transportation Agency the ability to continue to serve the travelling public, and will ensure that Canada continues to have a viable competitive air industry in the years to come. With these proposed amendments, we are regulating the industry smartly to ensure that it is as open and fair as possible to both competitors and consumers.

As we debate the bill today, our time may be short in terms of the House, but we do want to say to the other parties that are very active on this issue in terms of the Standing Committee on Transport that we look forward to receiving their suggestions and possible amendments that could further improve the legislation. Shippers and receivers certainly have brought to our attention some of their concerns in terms of Bill C-44. On behalf of the minister and the department, I want to say that we recommend that those who want changes made should attempt to dialogue with us. We want to develop the best possible transportation system for the good of all Canadians.

Hon. Keith Martin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question relates to the Pacific gateway strategy which is extremely important for the country and is very important for my province of British Columbia.

We have introduced about a \$590 million investment to buttress up our transportation arteries and also moneys to improve security in our transportation arteries post 9/11. This ties in to the very important CAN-Trade initiative. That initiative will enable us to get the information from abroad for our private sector. One of the big challenges is how we link up market opportunities internationally and our private sector here, particularly for small and medium size businesses that are too small to have their own intelligence capabilities to find out what opportunities exist abroad.

CAN-Trade is an excellent initiative that will involve our embassies and high commissions and perhaps a living website. Our embassies and high commissions will be able to extract from the countries in which they are situated that information that is important in terms of ascertaining job and market opportunities abroad. That information would be posted on a living website which would enable our private sector to access that information in real time.

Given the fact that we have the CAN-Trade initiative as well as the important investment in the Pacific gateway strategy, I would like my hon. colleague to expand on this initiative that our government has put forth. It is critically important not just for a three to five year electoral cycle but to build our country for the next 20 to 30 years. We are not investing in a very short timeline. We are investing for the next 20 to 30 years to enable our country to evolve and capitalize on market opportunities abroad.

●(1215)

Hon. Charles Hubbard: Mr. Speaker, as members already know, we have made a major initiative with Bill C-68 to further expand the Pacific gateway. That is only one of a number of initiatives that our government is working on. We are a trading nation. If we are to succeed as a trading nation, we have to have a very successful method of transportation to get those goods and services from our own country to others. I would like to commend the member and other British Columbia members for their work on Bill C-68 and the Pacific gateway.

It is not only the province of British Columbia but all of our western provinces and into the central heartland of Canada are looking at this initiative. We have a similar program at least being talked about in terms of the east with an Atlantic gateway and the big gateway going from our central provinces down to the Midwest in the United States.

Transportation is needed to get services from place to place. The hon. member talked about other factors that are so important to us in terms of our Canadian economy. He talked about opportunities for Canadian businesses, not only opportunities to make sure that they do get markets, but more important, opportunities that they see which must be protected by our various Canadian departments.

I can assure the member that in terms of foreign affairs and our international trading relationships, we as a government want to encourage the development of opportunities in other areas around the world, whether they be in Asia, Europe, or more important recently, in South America. With that, our government and the various departments are certainly working toward those initiatives.

Mr. Dave Batters (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport. We are fortunate enough to have him as a new member of the committee. I know he has been very interested in all that we have been doing at committee.

I would like to ask the parliamentary secretary two specific questions.

First, on Liberal air transport policy, I want to talk about airport rent and ask about the Liberal policy which has been tragic for airlines and for air passengers.

Pearson International Airport is the most expensive airport in the world at which to land a plane. It costs \$13,000 to land a 747 at Pearson. I have travelled with the Standing Committee on Transport. Numerous witnesses appeared before us in Toronto and Montreal. Every single witness talked about the desperate need for rent reduction. In Toronto, the major hub in this country, there was very little relief. That costs air travellers money.

Government Orders

The government said that it made some changes. Smaller increases in the future do not equal rent reductions. People at Pearson and across Canada are begging for relief in airport rents. I would like the member to comment on why the government has failed the air industry and has failed to deliver the much needed rent relief to Pearson.

On another point, I want to ask the member about the FRCC deal which was recently completed for hopper cars. Our interest on this side of the House is twofold. We are fighting hard for farmers. I am fighting hard for the jobs of the CPR workers in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan who maintain those cars. Is the member opposite aware that this deal went through with no open tendering process? We still do not know the maintenance costs for these cars. The FRCC is not even talking about savings for producers which was the entire idea to begin with. That was the pitch, that it would save producers money. It is not even being discussed any longer.

I wonder if the parliamentary secretary could deal with those two points.

• (1220)

Hon. Charles Hubbard: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure if time permits me to give a full answer to both very complex questions which the hon. member has posed.

I will attempt first to deal with Pearson Airport. We would have to go back to nearly 10 years ago when various airports in this country received through corporations the control of airports over a given period of time, usually 50 years. With that, these groups took over those airport facilities and began to operate them as non-profit corporations.

We in turn turned over to them some valuable real estate. We turned over facilities that had been paid for by the people of this country over a long period of time. Rents were developed and signed for. Agreements were made. Leases were determined. In good faith the Government of Canada signed leases with all the major airports across the nation.

Pearson International Airport began a very extensive period of redo, remake and buildup. In fact Pearson Development Corporation set up a program by which it borrowed nearly \$6 billion to improve the airport facilities. In terms of the rents that were agreed upon, we reduced those rents recently, but Pearson still contends that it has a problem trying to meet its rental obligations.

If we look at the annual report of Pearson airport, the Toronto transport group, we will find that the rent paid is a very small portion of the overall business allocations. In fact, it is paying more than \$350 million a year in interest on the money it borrowed. The government and I know our Toronto members tried to address this problem, but above all, it is a financial problem that Pearson airport has created for itself. We want to help that group because it is a great airport but it does have problems that are much greater than the rent that is being charged this past year of approximately \$130 million.

In response to the member's second question, it was the farmers who took over the freight car allocation. For a long period of time they worked to take over those cars. It is our belief that they are working for farmers, with farmers, in the best interests of farmers. They will be given those 12,000 cars if they agree with the

agreement. It will be in the best interests of the agricultural communities that supported their taking over the cars through the negotiations that we had with them over the past eight years or more.

Mr. Jim Gouk (British Columbia Southern Interior, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start my speech by sending a special message to someone very special. I spoke in the House last week and made a member's statement. I thought that would be the final time I would address the House. It turns out that much to my surprise the government has brought forward one of the more useless bills it has on the order paper. It talked about bringing this forward a number of times. I do not know if common sense prevailed or what, but it never did. Now suddenly on the final day of the government, we find ourselves with Bill C-44.

I am pleased to hear the parliamentary secretary to the minister say that he would concentrate mainly on air transportation. That is the part I would like to speak to as well.

Other bills could have been brought forward. I heard one mentioned. One of the questions the parliamentary secretary received from a member of his party caused him to raise Bill C-68, the Pacific gateway bill. That is a prime example of a bill that should have come forward, along with several other bills in the House. The government introduced it a long time ago. We indicated very clearly to the government that we would support that bill. For some reason it chose not to bring it forward. It is probably so the Liberals can campaign in British Columbia and say that it offered the bill and the Conservative Party caused it to be defeated.

We did nothing of a kind. The Liberals had more than ample time to bring it forward. They never did, and instead we find ourselves discussing bill C-44.

Let us talk about the genesis of the bill. When the new Minister of Transport came forward in Parliament, one of the things he said to our committee and to me personally, as the vice-chair of the committee, was he would reintroduce Bill C-26. Bill C-26 was the predecessor of Bill C-44. He did not say that he would take the intent of Bill C-26, redesign it and try to respond to the needs that had come up with all the problems in Bill C-26.

That was one of the dumber things I have heard him say. I have some measure of respect for the minister, and I temper that with the word "some" very strongly. However, bringing Bill C-26 forward and reintroducing it definitely has to go down as one of his more foolish moves. Bill C-26 was so bad that with a Liberal majority government it could not get the Liberals to vote for it. Why on earth would the government want to bring it forward in a minority?

Let us talk about some of the things that are wrong with the bill. As the parliamentary secretary addressed primarily the air industry, I will do the same, although I would be remiss if I did not put a few words in at the end of my speech on my old arch concerns about VIA Rail.

Government Orders

First, I would like to talk about airport rent. The parliamentary secretary to the minister said that the government wanted to help the air industry, that it recognized how important air transportation was. Those are funny words coming from a party that has done everything it can to destroy the air industry in the country.

Members of the Standing Committee on Transport have studied this both in Ottawa and across the country. We have listened to witnesses from every aspect and every sector of the air transportation industry. We made a series of recommendations by way of an interim report. One of the first recommendations was that the government immediately reduce airport rents by at least 75%. The government responded to that. It said that it already had taken care of this and that it would bring in a 60% reduction in the rent paid by the national airports over the term of their leases.

As my colleague said in questions and comments, after the parliamentary secretary spoke, that is not a rent reduction. That is a 60% reduction in the amount the government will increase it by in the future.

I have said that when I retire I will practise the three *gs*, namely garden, golf and grandson. My grandson is a year old. If he should happen to grow up, get into the air transport industry and even become the CEO of one of the airport authorities, then perhaps he may have something to be thankful for the government bringing in the 60% future reductions. That is provided the air transport sector survives under Liberal policy. We need rent reductions now.

•(1225)

Toronto airport was spoken very strongly about, and I would like to address a couple of the comments the minister has made in the past with regard to it. Many people have been crying loud and clear for reductions in the rent at Toronto airport in particular because of it having the highest landing fees in the world. The minister's response to that was twofold.

First, he said that if we did not like the fees there and if we did not like landing at Toronto airport, we could always land in Montreal. It is an interesting thing for the minister from Montreal to say. Maybe it will garner him a few votes there, except I hope the people in Montreal have the good sense, and I am sure they do, to recognize that if he is that out to lunch in terms of airport rents in Toronto, it will eventually affect them as well.

The second thing he said was that the rents were not all that big a deal, that they were only 14% of the budget of Toronto airport and that its debt load was 40%. Therefore, it is not the rent, it is the debt. Let us talk about that debt. Let us talk about why airports have debt and have spent a ton of money.

In Ottawa the terminal building that the airport authority took over was deplorable, as it was in Toronto and several other airports around the country. It financed \$335 million to build the new terminal that was long overdue. It did not cost the government or taxpayers a dime. The reason it was needed was the government of the day and governments in the past ignored the infrastructure needs of our airport system.

Airports used to lose for the government over \$200 million a year. That was while the government was not putting any money into it. That was just its operating cost, a \$200 million loss. Now all of a

sudden it is saying that they have to have fair value. If it cost \$200 million to run them and they were run for free, they have received fair value.

Over and above that, by the parliamentary secretary's own words, \$6 billion has been spent at the Toronto airport to build up the infrastructure that the government neglected. In fact, in the case of Toronto it was even worse. The Liberal government cancelled the newly signed Pearson contract that would have built a new terminal at no cost to the taxpayers whatsoever. It established, through legislation, that the contract holder would not be allowed to sue the government, and decreed how much it would get for damages by way of a settlement.

I listened to the Liberal rhetoric. I was green, I was new. I thought that if the government was saying it, it had to be true. I was shocked that it was going to give the airports as much money as it did. As the new transport critic, a member of Parliament and a member of the Standing Committee on Transport, I decided I would hit the books and study this so I could come up with arguments as to why they should not even get that much money, having done all the bad things the Liberals said they did.

Surprisingly, the more I studied this, the more I discovered it was not such a bad deal at all. In fact, it was a pretty good deal. It was such a good deal that I found a memo from the department asking how on earth they managed to get such a great contract. The department could not believe it got such a good contract on the department's behalf, and that is what the government cancelled.

Pearson has languished ever since. As part of the settlement that it finally was forced to make, it ended up buying terminal 3 back from private sector operators. That is where a lot of this debt has come from, all generated by the government.

The government did another thing, which was done by the minister's predecessor, David Collenette. This is one example of the really stupid things that has been done in the name of helping airports. Mr. Collenette said that there were a lot of problems, that the government was really soaking them with the rent, that he knew it was a problem, especially with the sudden downturn in traffic, so what the government would do was not cut the rent but defer it. They would still have to pay it, but the government would allow them not to pay it for a little while. That did absolutely no good because they had to put the money aside and save it for the day when the government said it had to be paid.

If the government wants to do something short term right away, it should cancel the payment of those deferrals. It was something that was supposedly going to help, at least the members opposite certainly crowed about it, and yet it does not do any good.

Government Orders

●(1230)

Another thing that needs to be brought up is ACAP. One of our recommendations was there should be a flow through of moneys received from airports. We heard a lot of people saying that airport rent should be eliminated. I do not support that. It should be greatly reduced. There should be enough money coming to the ACAP, the airport capital assistance program, for smaller airports that are the feeders for these national airports. We put forward that ACAP should be increased and stabilized. Right now there is no guarantee that it will even continue, and it has not increased. The government said that it was adequately funded. That is a lot of nonsense. The ACAP has not increased since it started. With the cost of everything going up, simply not increasing it means there is less money available for the various projects.

Another thing we asked was that the government simplify the application process. We talked to operators of the smaller airports who told us that it cost as much as \$10,000 to apply for ACAP funding. In the grand scheme of things, I know the former prime minister, Jean Chrétien, once said in the House, "what's a million?" A million dollars to the Liberal Party, with all the things it has done with taxpayer money, perhaps is not a tremendous amount of money. However, \$10,000 for a little airport with a small budget is a lot of money, and that is only to apply for funding that it may not get. It is a long, drawn out process and it is absolutely unnecessary and unacceptable.

However, the government says that it is all right because they can add the cost of the application to the cost of the project and apply for the whole thing. First, they have to put the money up. Second, they have no guarantee that they will get that funding. The government could do a lot better that it has in this area.

We also asked that no rent should be paid on airports with less than two million passengers. There has to be some base from when they can then generate enough money to run their airports and then start to pay the rent. The government's response to that is it believes that airports with less than 2,000 passengers not paying rent would not satisfy the government's real property policy that states, "Where public assets are leased to private or commercial entities, the government should receive a fair return".

We already have talked about fair return. Vancouver airport has undertaken a tremendous terminal expansion. It has built a second runway. It is continuing to expand its operation tremendously. It is known as one of the world authorities on the operation of an airport. What has it cost the government? What gas it cost taxpayers? Not one dime, but the government continues to use it as a cash cow to skim money from it.

Another of the recommendations was the government eliminate the air transport security fee and pay for the services through the consolidated revenues fund. The government says that the enhanced air travel security systems benefit principally and directly air travellers. In these circumstances the charge is fair and reasonable.

We have to ask ourselves what exactly is air security for? Is it for the security of the passengers or is this enhanced security that came as a direct result of 9/11 for the protection of the public at large against acts of terrorism?

The overwhelming damage and death toll in the case of 9/11 was not to the aircraft or the passengers on board, catastrophic though those events were. The damage and the largest loss of life was in the buildings. Therefore, we are doing this for the general safety of the public, and nowhere else in security does the general public not pay these security fees. They do not load this on any other sector. The government seems to think that there is so much money in the air transport sector that it can apply whatever charges it wants at any time at all.

Another thing we asked for was that customs services be provided at airports that can demonstrate they have regular transporter or international services. The government's response to that is charging fees for services has been the government's policy, dating back to 1989, and that it will have to continue with that. That is not true either. That is a very inconsistent statement because we do not charge any one sector. We do not charge the people who benefit when they cross the border. If that were the case, why are all the people who do not cross the border paying for those customs services at the border? The Liberals could charge a fee for everybody who comes across, if that is what they truly believe. Therefore, their policy is extremely inconsistent.

●(1235)

I want to get on to my favourite topic, VIA Rail, because this goes back right to my first days in Parliament and some of the things I found out about VIA.

I have a measure of respect for VIA and the service it provides, particularly in the Quebec-Windsor corridor. It is a necessary service. Essentially, it is an extension of commuter rail.

There are basically three types of service provided by railroad for passengers. One is commuter rail, in which I will include the Quebec-Windsor corridor and intercity transportation, but it is still essentially commuter rail and travel in a high density corridor. I think that it is quite justifiable to move people, to keep them off the highways, and to provide better access to travel. It is in a very restricted area.

We have it in Vancouver, not run by VIA Rail. We have a very good commuter service there. We have one in Toronto and we have one in Montreal. Then we have VIA Rail providing this intercity connection as well in the corridor.

We have remote communities. It is appropriate for the government to take a role in ensuring that remote communities are captured by way of differing types of transportation and have some service provided to them and ensure that service is maintained. The third thing is rail tourism. Rail tourism is for tourists getting a tourism experience.

Government Orders

We do not have passenger rail outside of those three items I mentioned. There is no such thing as regular passenger rail. For example, VIA Rail runs from Edmonton to Vancouver. Aircraft fly from Edmonton to Vancouver and the Greyhound bus goes from Edmonton to Vancouver. Only one of those three is subsidized, and that is VIA Rail. Even though it is subsidized, VIA Rail is the most expensive of those three methods of travel. It takes 17 times longer to go by VIA Rail than it does to go by aircraft. Obviously, people are not riding it simply for the transportation. They have to pay more and it takes infinitely longer to get there. The only reason they are on that train is for the rail experience, in other words, rail tourism, so why are we asking the taxpayers of Canada to subsidize tourism experiences?

We have a private sector company in British Columbia and Alberta that provides that amply well. It bought the service from VIA Rail. Travelling on the southern route and as well through to Jasper, VIA Rail used to carry about 5,000 passengers a year and lose money. The private sector company that took it over, and invested millions and millions of dollars in advertising, has won awards all over the world. It just recently won a very prestigious award by the International Tourism Association as one of the best rail experiences in the world. It carries over 80,000 passengers. Yet, we still have VIA Rail wanting to go back and compete with them and the government is looking at supporting VIA Rail on that. It is absolutely unacceptable.

VIA Rail only pays one-fifth of the trackage fees to CN and CP that companies like the Rocky Mountaineer have to pay because the government negotiated that and forced that on the freight rails. That is one-fifth, so they are getting that over and above the \$500,000 a day in taxpayer subsidies.

I think the government is being very unfair to VIA Rail. VIA Rail should be allowed to operate commercially within the corridor, do a good job, and probably get a lot of kudos for doing so. I think it is absolutely wrong to subsidize a government operation to compete against the private sector.

I would like to go on about this and many other sectors and talk a lot more about VIA Rail as well, but I will end by saying, first, that I am very disappointed that the government chose to bring such an inappropriate bill forward when there are so many things that needed to be brought forward that we would have helped to pass had it done so. The Liberals have had the opportunity. We even gave them the opportunity to extend the Parliament to get those things through, if necessary, and they have turned it all down, perhaps so they can make a bunch of false campaign statements when they get out there.

The other thing I would like to say is that this will definitely be the last time that I will rise in the House as a member of Parliament. The government's life will end tonight and everyone will go on the campaign trail. I will not be returning. Perhaps some others, particularly on the other side, will not be returning either, but they think they are returning. I know I am not returning.

• (1240)

This is my last time, Mr. Speaker. To you and to the House, and to all members of the House in all parties, thank you for the experience. I have enjoyed it, these bills notwithstanding, because I know that good work can be done as well. Good work was certainly been done

in the committee. That is what I was talking about today. We would have a better government if it would listen to and follow the reports of committees like the transport committee instead of coming up with bills like this.

• (1245)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wish to congratulate the member for his time in the House. It will not be his last time to speak because he will get to answer my question.

The member tried to do a lot of scooting around and getting out of the fact that his party is forcing us into a Christmas and winter election. There are some things that the government has proposed that will not be done. The schedule should have been followed and everyone agreed all year to have an election in a couple of months.

The member mentioned ACAP. That has been a great program for our department, the airports program. The runway and the apron have been two projects at the Dawson City airport. The Old Crow airport, in the farthest northwest first nation community in the country, has also benefited from this program. This has been a tremendous program for my riding, along with all the other infrastructure funds, and has amounted to approximately \$55 million in Yukon. Strategic infrastructure has rebuilt part of the Alaska Highway and put bridges on the Alaska Highway and the Whitehorse waterfront. Many Yukon municipalities are receiving projects.

I thank the member for mentioning this, so that I could outline the utility that these programs have had for my riding. I am very happy with those programs. I certainly hope that the government continues with these programs.

Mr. Jim Gouk: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the two points that he raised. I most assuredly want to talk about the first as well as the second.

First, the member mentioned forcing the election. What a lot of crap. I know this hon. member and I guess I cannot say "Larry of the North", so I will not, but we say that affectionately when working with the member on committee and at other times.

To say that the Conservatives are forcing the election is wrong. Bad government is forcing the election. Corruption is forcing the election. A loss of moral authority to government is forcing the election. If the government had not signed a deal with the devil as it were to keep it on life support, when it certainly did not deserve it, we would have ended its rule, its reign, and its dictatorship last spring.

The Liberals signed a deal with the NDP and I understand why the NDP did that. It has very much been the champion of social programs. On the surface the budget amendment looked as though it actually addressed social programs, but it did not. If we were to read the budget amendment, we would find that there are only 68 words that describe how \$4.5 billion is going to be spent.

Government Orders

When we listen to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, he actually said in the House that it does not mean we are going to spend it. It is an enabling bill that would allow us to spend up to that amount. In actual fact, nobody is going to see any of that money.

It was good publicity for the NDP. I understand that. Unfortunately, that is part of the workings of this House. It was certainly a good deal for the Prime Minister. He said he would sign off on that. It really did not cost him anything and it kept the government going a bit longer.

Then the Liberals had other opportunities. They had an opportunity to accept a deal put forward by the NDP that would have prevented this election happening until after the new year. It would have given the government time to bring forward bills, such as Bill C-68, the Pacific gateway bill.

In fact, the government could have met with the House leaders and said, "Okay, which bills can everybody support? What is your priority? Let's move forward with the ones that people support, so we can get those things passed". The Liberals would have found that a lot of bills would have passed, including Bill C-68.

People have to understand that it hits me right here every time I say something favourable about Bill C-68. I recall the \$2 billion useless firearms registry under that same number.

As far as ACAP funding goes, the member who raised the question is absolutely right, it has been a good program. The funding is sliding downward rather than up. There is no stability in it. There is an incredible cost to apply for it, as I mentioned earlier on, and it is a crap shoot. The funding is applied for and nobody knows if they get the funding or not. Applications are not made frivolously.

When a runway is crumbling and a small airport is trying to service an entire region, it is critically important that these projects be funded. The government could do a lot better than it has done.

• (1250)

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for his service here. I visited his constituency about a year ago and he was one of the people who welcomed me and some of my colleagues, and I appreciated that.

He sounds like he is keen to run in the next election given his answer to the parliamentary secretary. I think he is having a little difficulty separating himself from the job and the campaign.

It is hard to understand what difficulties he would have with respect to increased funding for post-secondary education, affordable housing, foreign aid, environmental measures, and worker protection. I am baffled by his response to the better balanced budget that the New Democrats put forward. I am baffled by the Conservatives response to the investments that were achieved for Canadians in that budget.

I have two questions for him about this legislation. Part of this legislation deals with an amendment to the Railway Safety Act. The amendment would set up a public complaints process for security officers employed by the railway. Concern has been expressed in the past about the lack of a public complaints process regarding security

officials for railways. This process has been called for for many years. I wonder if he could comment on that.

The bill proposes a streamline approval process for the construction of new international bridges or tunnels. I often get nervous when I hear about streamlining around major development proposals, especially those in heavily populated areas or rural areas where there might be concern about land going out of agricultural production, or in neighbourhoods where a new bridge or tunnel could cause havoc for life in that neighbourhood. Certain neighbourhoods in Windsor are facing that kind of situation with respect to the proposal to improve the border crossing there.

I wonder if he could comment on those two aspects of the legislation.

Mr. Jim Gouk: Mr. Speaker, as much as the Liberals have a real talent for writing bad legislation, even they cannot put nothing but bad in this legislation. These kinds of omnibus bills have always been a problem in the House. They contain a few good things, but there is always a lot of bad things. We simply cannot support those few good things and ignore all the bad stuff.

The bill touches on things like railway safety. Some areas that may have merit cannot be accepted over and above all the bad stuff in the bill. I am sure the hon. member is aware of that and is as troubled as I am with the omnibus nature of some of the government's bills.

Let me tell the member some of the reasons why we did not support his so-called better balanced budget. Nine words described foreign aid spending in his so-called better budget. Worker protection was not even included. The budget was not hard to read. It contained 68 words in total about how money was going to be spent. Sixty-eight words and not one word about worker protection in that budget. He does not need to raise that red herring.

Mr. Dave Batters (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for British Columbia Southern Interior who has been a fantastic member in the House, serving both his constituents and his caucus. He has also been a great source of help to me personally. As a fellow member of the Standing Committee on Transport, he has been a wealth of information. I wish him well in the three Gs: garden, golf and grandson. We will all miss the member for British Columbia Southern Interior.

As a new member of this 38th Parliament, I would like to ask the member a bit about the democratic deficit that we have heard about in this place. I question the teeth of the Standing Committee on Transport. Three reports were completely ignored by the Minister of Transport: the report on airport rent that the committee spent considerable time on; the report on air liberalization and open skies; and the complete disregard of the report on the farmer rail car coalition. Two days before the government falls we hear this deal is going ahead in complete contravention of all the recommendations made by the transport committee.

I would like the member's comment on the democratic deficit that he has seen in this Parliament. I will finish by again wishing him well in all his future endeavours.

Government Orders

• (1255)

Mr. Jim Gouk: Mr. Speaker, in terms of the democratic deficit, as I said to reporters when I talked to a number of people about leaving this place, if this House had worked the way that the Standing Committee on Transport worked for the most part, we would have had a better House. For the most part on the transport committee we have put partisan issues aside, although they have to arise once in a while. We have listened to one another. We have considered one another's positions and we have accepted that. If this House would operate that way, more democratically, we would have a much better place.

Specifically with regard to the member's question on the hopper car issue, that was one of several recommendations from our committee. It was ignored by the government. The minister himself said that he would look very favourably at that, but actually the Minister of Finance is the scarecrow in all this. Every time we make a recommendation about airport rents, I have to go see you know who.

With hopper cars, maybe it is a coincidence but one of the principal activists in the Farmer Rail Car Coalition is now the campaign manager of the Minister of Finance. I wonder how he made out in this whole process and if that was his reward for trying to get king you know who re-elected.

The Deputy Speaker: I wish to add my voice and say congratulations to the member for British Columbia Southern Interior. He has been a fine member of Parliament and a workhorse on committee and on the transportation issue. Congratulations to him.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague who just spoke. We sat together on the Standing Committee on Transport, and I had the opportunity to get to know this gentleman who is dedicated to transportation services in Canada. I want to pay tribute to him, congratulate him and wish him good luck in the next chapter of his life.

I am pleased to take part in the debate on Bill C-44 to amend the Canada Transportation Act.

First, I want to take this opportunity to say how very disappointed I am that the federal government took eight long months before re-introducing this bill in the House. We have been waiting for over eight months, in fact, to debate this bill, the importance of which the Minister of Transport has acknowledged from the start. However, he waited until the very last day, a few hours before the government is set to lose a non-confidence vote, before re-introducing this bill, which is extremely important to Quebeckers and all Canadians.

The same goes for the aerospace policy and sending a formal notice to CN to sort out the Quebec Bridge problem. He waited until a few hours before the government loses a non-confidence motion.

Today, we are entitled to ask this Minister of Transport what are his interests and what is his motive? Since an election is imminent,

the chances of this bill receiving rapid consideration are quite slim. It is quite outrageous that this bill, like its predecessor, Bill C-26, will die on the order paper a second time.

Once again, the entire process will have to start all over, and this will have serious repercussions on a number of transportation sectors and a number of communities. If the minister truly had this bill at heart, he would have introduced it well before today.

I would like to re-examine certain aspects of Bill C-44 which strike me as particularly worthy of mention. We are, of course, in favour of the principle of this bill, particularly since I personally wrote the Minister of Transport in November 2004 asking him to reintroduce this bill promptly. Had time allowed, however, we would have certainly proposed some amendments, because the Minister of Transport, like all his colleagues, does not tend to pay that much attention to the opposition, even if its recommendations are good ones.

Generally speaking, Bill C-44 addresses major transportation issues. Among its main points: increased efficiency in air and rail sectors, and enhanced processes for complaints and consumer protection. There is even some reference made to the concept of environmental protection.

There are three measures among the legislative provisions proposed in this bill that particularly attract my attention. They deal with air and rail sectors and concern airline advertising, noise relating to rail operations, and discontinuance of rail operations.

I feel that consumer protection is absolutely vital, and that the increase in open competition so much desired by the Minister of Transport must not in any way penalize the consumer, who is entitled to greater transparency.

In this connection, Bill C-44 will amend part II of the Transportation Act in relation to complaints processes, the advertising of prices for air services and the disclosure of terms and conditions of carriage. These new measures will provide for greater control over the sale of airline tickets, among other things by giving the agency jurisdiction over ticket sales advertising.

Licenses must in future display, in a prominent place at their business offices, a sign indicating that the rates for the service offered, including the terms and conditions of carriage, are available for inspection. This also applies to any services available on their Internet site. I should remind hon. members that consumer habits have changed a great deal with the advent of the Internet. I feel it is important to extend this obligation to Internet sites because a high percentage of services are now purchased in this way.

• (1300)

So the terms and conditions of carriage must be made available for inspection.

Government Orders

The Canadian Transportation Agency gets a new regulatory power allowing it to require through regulations that the prices for air services mentioned in any advertisement indicate the fees, duties and taxes being charged on behalf of others, so that the consumer is easily able to determine how much the service will cost.

Although this is a step in the right direction, we must ensure that the agency uses this power in the best interest of consumers and does so in a rigorous and proactive manner. Consumer groups have been calling for more transparent rates for a long time now. These new transparency measures will be as good for consumers as for the airlines, which will be able to engage in healthier competition.

Airline advertisements have often been publicly criticized. Last February, Option consommateurs, a Quebec-based consumer group, looked at over 20 ads published by three airlines including Air Canada, WestJet and CanJet. The conclusion was surprising, not to say scandalous. This type of advertising could be described as misrepresentation. The difference between the advertised rate and the true cost of the ticket was as high as 91%. The problem is with all the other fees added later including navigation fees, the air travellers security charge and so forth.

Another equally misleading practice is offering a good rate. Often that good rate is for a one way ticket. We know full well that in most cases people flying to their destination also have to come back. This is misleading and unacceptable. Airlines looking to build their clientele find it more useful to announce the lowest cost rather than the total including all the fees. Unfortunately, the consumer is duped into believing that he got a good deal.

There is another item I would like to address and that is the Air Travel Complaints Commissioner position, which was cut in the last budget by the Minister of Finance. In the same breath he announced that the Canadian Transportation Agency would be assuming responsibility for the complaints program. Bill C-44 no longer provides for the commissioner's position and incorporates those duties into the regular operations of the agency. In this specific case, there are pros and cons. On one hand it is good that the agency can require the transporter to compensate those affected by the non-application of the terms and conditions of carriage. This is a step forward since the complaints commissioner could only make suggestions at the time.

There are, however, a few shortcomings. The Canadian Transportation Agency is no longer required to submit an annual report on complaints and their resolution. This report highlighted errors and shortcomings. The commissioner could also require the carriers to provide considerable information during the complaint process. The agency can longer do so. I find the weakening of the role of the transportation agency most regrettable. It loses some of its investigative powers and part of its visibility.

Last week, I met the Travellers Protection Initiative. This organization considers the measures put forward in the bill inadequate and too weak to protect airline passengers. It advocates strengthening the bill's provisions. Certainly no one has forgotten the Jetsgo saga of last March, as hundreds of travellers were left stranded when the airline abruptly ceased operations at the peak of the holiday period. Such a situation must never occur again. I spoke out against it at the time.

The Bloc Québécois clearly feels that the government must assume its responsibilities. It could, for example, propose a compensation fund be established to reimburse the cost of tickets when consumers purchase them directly from the airline, as is increasingly the case.

Clearly, there is work to be done on the bill in a number of respects.

In addition to the legislative amendments with respect to the airline sector, another very important aspect of Bill C-44 concerns rail transportation.

● (1305)

The aim of the proposed measures is to amend Part III of the Canada Transportation Act, creating a mechanism for dealing with complaints about noise and amending provisions dealing with the transfer and discontinuance of the operation of railway lines.

The Bloc has, for many years, been calling for legislative amendments to resolve the serious problems of noise faced by many communities. I refer to the harmful effects of noise from the construction or operation of the railway, including the movement of cars in marshalling yards.

In recent years, the public and the railways have often been at loggerheads. The public bothered by noise has no recourse but to complain directly to the railway concerned or initiate civil proceedings. No federal agency is currently empowered to intervene in such instances.

Hence the importance of legislation in this regard so that the railways feel some pressure and take the initiative to limit the disturbances caused by railway construction or operation.

I would remind the Minister of Transport that this is also a problem in his own back yard, because a class action against Canadian Pacific has just been authorized. A group of citizens in the Outremont area can no longer stand the disturbances caused by the CP switching yard. The court found that it was important to decide whether CP is imposing excessive inconvenience on its immediate neighbours in connection with its activities. It would, in my opinion, be simpler, and certainly far less costly, to settle this problem before the Canadian Transportation Agency.

These legislative amendments are a step in the right direction, but I have some amendments to propose, or rather ones I would have liked to propose. However, given the lax attitude of the Minister of Transport, who waited until the last minute to introduce this bill, I imagine we will be coming back to it in another session. Then we will have some amendments to propose in order to clarify the terminology on the rail companies' obligations.

Government Orders

I will try to ensure that the agency's jurisdiction will not be just over noise, but also over emissions or vibrations from rail cars. Now we are in the Kyoto protocol era, environmental issues are extremely important.

I know that rail transport is an excellent alternative to road transport and is key to economic development in Quebec. However, there must be a balance between such economic objectives and the environment, particularly in terms of respecting the public's quality of life and well-being.

The powers granted to the Canadian Transportation Agency are in no way prejudicial to the railway companies, particularly since the agency will now have the power to issue and publish guidelines, after consulting with interested parties, and to propose a mechanism for the collaborative resolution of noise complaints. Consequently, each party will know the other's limits. The purpose of this is to resolve such conflicts peacefully and without delay.

I am pleased to see that urban transit authorities will now be recognized. A section has been added under which a railway company wishing to sell a railway line shall first offer it to the municipal governments and urban transit authorities concerned. These new provisions are desirable and will provide better protection for the unique transportation network provided by urban railway corridors. I have always considered rail transport to be an excellent alternative to road transport. Such measures, therefore, should be encouraged.

Although we support Bill C-44 in principle, we are extremely disappointed. This is proof of the lax attitude of the Minister of Transport, who has done nothing to bring forward this bill or ensure that it becomes law.

• (1310)

[*English*]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank you for your wonderful service this term. I know that it has not been easy, but you are doing a great job.

The hon. member's excellent and positive speech covered a lot of very good areas. I hope the hon. member will support a major project for Canada in my riding. She has probably heard me mention the Alaska railway link, joining the railway that is already there with the great Canadian Railway Network, which would be a great expansion of railway in Canada. There is a study going on now to see whether it is feasible economically, socially and environmentally. Hopefully she would be in support of this, and for one of the reasons she mentioned, which is the environmental aspects of rail.

Also, we have a great railway that comes from the ocean in Alaska, from Skagway up to Whitehorse. It was an engineering feat at the time of the gold rush and is carrying a record number of tourists now. Part of the act would make sure that the railbed could not be dismantled without at least offering it to the city of Whitehorse, for instance, or other areas that could use that rail. It would be much more environmentally friendly for us to have tourists on that rail rather than in trucks or cars. I hope the member would support those types of initiatives.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his comment or, rather, his question.

As I said in my speech, if there is one thing that is important to the Bloc Québécois it is the entire set of environmental issues. The railway is, of course, environmentally friendly.

However, I am somewhat disappointed in my colleague's speech. In fact, he should not be addressing his comment to me but to the government, which has done nothing, and especially to the Minister of Transport. The minister is quite adept at playing petty politics on the backs of Quebeckers. However, when it comes to drafting bills on transportation to implement concrete measures everywhere in Quebec and Canada to promote sustainable development, we are still waiting.

I tabled a bill to promote public transportation by giving a financial incentive to those who use it. The House passed it at second reading. However, the government could have sped up the process by passing it at third reading. That way Quebeckers and Canadians could now be benefiting from a tax deduction for using public transportation. However, nothing came of it.

At the last minute, of course, this government is quickly handing out some goodies, thinking it can buy votes in Quebec and Canada. I simply want to remind my colleague that Quebeckers and Canadians will not be had.

[*English*]

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member's speech was interesting, particularly when she described the efficacy of the Canadian Transportation Agency in dealing with consumer concerns. She had concerns about whether this agency would exercise the new powers that are included in the act. She also said she thought that a major consumer organization said that the powers it had were too timid. That is a very serious concern for me.

We do need effective consumer protection. I have seen a number of Canadian agencies that are like the Canada Industrial Relations Board, which has proven completely ineffective in terms of serving telecommunications workers in my riding who were locked out by the TELUS corporation. They won quite a number of judgments at the CIRB regarding bargaining in bad faith, yet none of them were enforced.

I have heard complaints by the steelworkers about the lack of community input and representation on an agency such as the Canadian International Trade Tribunal.

We have heard concerns from members of ACTRA about the CRTC and its inability to stand up for Canadian content regulations and how important that is to workers in that industry.

Could the member comment further on how this agency might be made truly effective in dealing with the kinds of consumer issues that confront air travellers in Canada?

Government Orders

•(1315)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire: Mr. Speaker, my colleague's question is indeed a very pertinent one. I would have like to have had more time for debate, because I believe there are grounds for amendment or, at the very least, improvement to this bill.

Unfortunately, we are running out of time. The clock will strike midnight in five minutes. Perhaps I am suffering from acute paranoia, but I suspect that, when all is said and done, it may have suited the Minister of Transport to have us discuss this bill at the last minute.

I would have liked far more time in order to improve this bill and perhaps find some way to give more power to the agency. The consumer group Option consommateurs recognizes the existence of numerous shortcomings in both air and rail transport.

Today we can talk all we want, offer suggestions, express wishes, but we know very well that the government will fall within hours. Let us hope that the next Minister of Transport will be far more attuned to consumers and more respectful of Quebec's demands.

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague for her speech on transportation bill C-44. I know how keen she was on getting this bill before the House so that we could dispose of it before the end of the business of this House.

My question is on the safety of people living close to rail lines. This was touched on briefly already. There are 12 cities or towns in my riding and 10 of these have rail lines running through them. There is, of course, the noise problem my colleague has referred to, but there is also the matter of vibrations and obstruction of roads into town. The municipal bylaws allow only two access roads to cross the tracks, but often, because of the length of the train, both of these are blocked by the same train, and it may sit there for many minutes, sometimes hours. This is totally inconceivable. The municipalities must take action.

Does my colleague believe there is anything in this bill to reassure the people of my riding that the agency could, in future, intervene to settle problems such as this?

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Chambly—Borduas and pay tribute to him, because he is doing a very good job of defending his constituents. We have spent a lot of time talking about the problems with the railways, particularly in his riding.

The agency will have a little bit more power. However, we do have one criticism: this section does not restrict nuisances other than noise. Consequently, the agency will not be able to resolve complaints or mediate solutions relating to vibrations, for example, or fumes such as oils and gasoline.

As I have said all along, in principle, that would have been one of the amendments we would have made or suggested with regard to extending the agency's powers. I must remind the House that, in light of recommendations made at the request of stakeholders, the agency will still have a little bit more power than before. However, this does not change the fact that complaints about noise may wind up in

court. As a result, this may discourage people from filing a complaint.

It is also important to remember that the minister could have shown leadership by sending a clear message to the railway companies. He could have told them that they needed to be good corporate citizens. Obviously, we want to give them a hand and increase rail transport but, at the same time, we want them to be good companies.

Citizens have rights. When anyone locates next to a yard or station, there may be some inconveniences. However, the railway company—be it CN, CP Rail or even VIA Rail—must be aware of the impact its activities have on the public. We wish that we could have improved the bill in committee or even in the House, in order to ensure greater respect for the well-being of people in Quebec and Canada.

•(1320)

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is with some frustration today that I rise to speak to Bill C-44, an act to amend the Canada Transportation Act.

Members of the NDP caucus will be supporting referral to committee of Bill C-44, although, as I will enumerate throughout my presentation, we have serious concerns about certain aspects of this bill. Other aspects of the bill we are very much in favour of. The frustration stems from the fact that this bill has languished for 10 months. It was introduced in March 2005. We are at the end of November 2005 and lo and behold, surprise, surprise, suddenly the government is moving on this bill which should have been moved back in March. It is now 10 months later and that is absolutely appalling.

When we take into consideration the importance of the transportation infrastructure and transportation in Canada, the world's largest democracy and a country that is with geographic challenges that virtually no other country in the world has to face, our transportation infrastructure is absolutely vital. The fact that the government sat on this bill for 10 months before deciding to move it forward on the eve of a vote on a non-confidence motion is extremely frustrating to members of Parliament who are concerned about this issue.

It is not surprising because we have seen the Liberal government over the last two weeks try to make up for its neglect over the past 12 years. For 12 years there has been inaction in a whole variety of areas and now suddenly in the last two weeks we have seen the government cramming as though it were cramming for an exam, trying desperately to show some progress in areas that it has neglected. I will come back to transportation in a moment, but let us look at some of the other issues.

There is the question of child poverty. We have a record number of poor children in this country and the government has done nothing about that.

Government Orders

There is the issue of the decline in quality of jobs. We know that 60% of Canadian families have seen a decline in their income in real terms on the watch of the Liberal government. Over 60% of Canadian families are earning less in real terms than they were in 1989. The government has done virtually nothing to address that issue. In fact, in a very irresponsible way it has talked about this myth of prosperity, that somehow Canadians are doing extremely well.

We know that the wealthy in this country are doing better than ever. Corporate lawyers and CEOs have had substantial increases in their family incomes, but for most Canadian families it is harder and harder to make ends meet. The government refuses to recognize that, let alone do anything about it.

On the environment there was an announcement this week that greenhouse gas emissions, when the target was a reduction of 20%, have actually increased by 24%. In fact, Canada is one of the worst offenders in the industrialized world. The government has shown absolutely no inclination to seriously address the environmental issues that the member for Toronto—Danforth and the rest of the NDP caucus have been pushing in the House.

There is the issue of for profit health care, another area where the Liberal government has refused to take action. We see public health care dollars increasingly used to finance private for profit health care. We know in the United States that private for profit health care costs twice as much and leaves tens of millions of Americans out of any sort of substantive health care system.

This lack of action on transportation is similar to the lack of action that I have mentioned in a whole host of other areas. That is why in the New Democratic Party corner of the House, along with our colleagues from the Bloc Québécois and the Conservative Party, the frustration with the government has reached new highs.

Let us get back to the issue of Bill C-44. I would like to briefly enumerate the key amendments to the Canada Transportation Act that were tabled in Parliament, as I mentioned, last March and which we are finally discussing today on the eve of a non-confidence vote.

• (1325)

The bill includes a new, modernized and simplified national transportation policy statement; new provisions addressing the approval and regulation of international bridges and tunnels; a new provision authorizing the Canadian Transportation Agency, on the recommendation of the minister, to regulate greater transparency in the advertisement of air fares, and I will come back to that in a moment; improvements to and expansion of the recourses available to rail shippers while maintaining existing running rights; improvements to the policy framework for publicly funded passenger rail services; a public interest review process for mergers and acquisitions of all federally regulated transportation services; a provision allowing the Canadian Transportation Agency to address railway noise complaints, and I will come back to that as it is one aspect of the bill that we strongly support; legislative framework to consolidate the current powers of VIA Rail Canada; a reduction in the number of members of the Canadian Transportation Agency; and the integration of the air travel complaints function into its normal business. There are other clauses. This bill is fairly lengthy with 60 pages and has a variety of amendments.

I would like to touch on the key areas. I will start with the issue of the modernized and simplified national transportation policy statement. Fundamentally, this is an area of key neglect by the Liberal government. We heard the announcement again in the cramming that we have seen over the last two weeks on the Pacific gateway initiative in British Columbia for transportation infrastructure. The fact is that the infrastructure issue has not been addressed in over a decade. We have seen systematic penny-wise and pound foolish policies. There have been cuts to the kind of capital funding that is needed to allow our infrastructure to keep current with expanding demand. With the transportation infrastructure, it is fundamentally important.

In British Columbia, because we have fallen behind, \$2.5 billion would be needed right now for the transportation infrastructure. We saw with the Pacific gateway that about \$190 million has been allocated. A big chunk of that is actually going to support the operations of another Liberal appointed board that will be set up to oversee that structure. Three projects have been approved out of that \$190 million in total moneys, which falls appallingly short of the actual needs, which as I mentioned are \$2.5 billion.

Some \$191 million has been allocated for three projects: one in Saskatchewan, one in Delta and one in Port Coquitlam in British Columbia. Another \$400 million has been set aside, basically awaiting the election, one would imagine. The money has not been allocated. It is money that will be part of some photo opportunity, I would imagine, over the course of the next few weeks. The reality is that we are falling so phenomenally short of what is needed to address the critical infrastructure needs in British Columbia. I mention that because this is just one example of the neglect we have seen in our transportation infrastructure over the course of the Liberal government.

In my own riding of Burnaby—New Westminster, we have seen with Fraser port that the Fraser Port Authority is being obliged to spend approximately \$3 million a year to fund dredging of the Fraser River, when that money should be going toward maintaining and enhancing the capital infrastructure that is needed in transportation with the Fraser Port Authority. There is \$3.1 million going to that ongoing dredging maintenance because the dredging is not being funded through the Ministry of Transport. What is happening is that Fraser port is not able to keep up with the capital funding to provide the infrastructure to meet its growing needs and to provide for the important maintenance of the existing infrastructure. It is another example of neglect.

A final example I would like to mention when we talk about the national transportation policy statement is the lack of clarity around the funding for the Toronto Port Authority. I have raised in the House before that \$35 million was allocated to the Toronto Port Authority for a bridge that was never built. For all intents and purposes, this is money that is a grant to the Toronto Port Authority when we know that the Canada Marine Act prohibits such a grant. For weeks and weeks we have been demanding answers. For months there have been access to information requests made. The government refuses to come clean on what happened to that \$35 million, where it went, to whom it was paid and what the justification was.

Government Orders

•(1330)

I raise all that by way of background. They are three key examples of why the issue of a policy statement is beyond the greater issue which is the Liberal government's neglect of transportation. That is undeniable, British Columbia being a key case where \$2.5 billion is needed and \$191 million has been granted. That is the first key amendment I wanted to address.

The second is the issue around the approval and regulation of international bridges and tunnels. As I mentioned at the outset, we in the NDP will be supporting sending the bill to committee to get the important amendments. Again we are frustrated by the fact that we have been waiting 10 months for the bill to come forward. It could have easily gone through. We could have applied those amendments and we could be speaking at third reading and passing the bill today, but because of the delay by the government, we are not doing that.

We have concerns about the issue of the approval of regulation on international bridges and tunnels. My colleague the member for Windsor West will be speaking to that very issue in the House later this afternoon.

The third issue I would like to address is that of creating transparency on airfares. This is something that is addressed to a certain extent in Bill C-44, the issue of creating transparency and having an air travel complaints function, but it falls far short of what is actually needed.

I would like to mention some of the concerns that have been raised by the organizations that are involved in the travellers' protection initiative. I would like to reiterate what one of the members of the travellers' protection initiative, the president and CEO of the Travel Industry Council of Ontario, Michael Pepper, said.

The travellers' protection initiative is a Canada-wide alliance of consumer protection and industry groups formed to demand greater federal government protection for Canadian airline passengers. It was launched in June of this year. It is comprised of the Travel Industry Council of Ontario, the Association of Canadian Travel Agencies, the Public Interest Advocacy Centre and Quebec-based Option consommateurs. There are also a wide variety of other groups representing consumers from across Canada that are part of the travellers' protection initiative.

They are calling on the federal government to address their six point air travel consumer reform. Very clearly, Bill C-44 does not address their concerns. They are calling for the following elements: greater financial monitoring and disclosure to the public; protection of advanced ticket sales; full price disclosure in all advertising media; reinstatement and strengthening of the position of air complaints commissioner; a national travellers' compensation fund for when airlines fail.

Jetsgo and Canada 3000 are two recent examples where the fact that this is not in place has meant real hardship for consumers. Some people have lost everything. In the case of Jetsgo, last spring people found themselves completely out of pocket for the tickets that they had purchased because there is no protection for travellers. The issue of a national travellers' compensation fund is fundamental to

addressing the important issues that Bill C-44 touches on, but it does not address those issues adequately.

Finally, the travellers' protection initiative calls for a program within Transport Canada to collect and publish information on airline service performance in order to better inform consumers about their choices and promote fair competition among airlines.

If the government had chosen to bring forward Bill C-44 last spring, we would have already been able to push those amendments through, because the NDP strongly supports the travellers' protection initiative, and today we would be debating a bill that would be better and clearly more in the public interest.

•(1335)

I mentioned earlier the issue around the noise provisions for dealing with noise complaints in Bill C-44. This is an element that we strongly support. There is no existing noise complaint mechanism. In fact, in my riding of Burnaby—New Westminster, in the Westminster Quay neighbourhood, this is a key concern. People have no effective way of dealing with the issue of railway noise complaints. In the case of the Westminster Quay, this affects many thousands of residents. So, this is one aspect of the bill that is good. It could be improved through investigation at committee. But, again, because of the time when this is coming forward, we are looking at a bill that, through the 10 month neglect with Bill C-44, obviously will not go through the required hoops for adoption.

Finally, there are a couple of other issues. There is the issue of VIA Rail. We strongly support enhancing our national rail passenger service. VIA Rail is a fundamental part of that. We saw with the Conservative cutbacks that the Liberals have basically kept those in place. We continue to have parts of the VIA Rail network that no longer exist. A very important aspect of that is the rail line from Winnipeg, the southern line through to Vancouver. Here we have an issue of the neglect of VIA Rail that would finally start to be addressed. However, given the 10 months of waiting for Bill C-44 to finally be introduced by the government, we will not be able to adequately deal with that section.

Then there are the amendments with regard to a public interest review process for mergers and acquisitions that are part of the bill.

We know full well how effective the government is when it talks about public interest review. We saw an example of that last week with Terasen. Here is a case where a key public utility in British Columbia is being acquired by a George Bush bagman. Investment Canada should have been doing the due diligence on that, do a public interest review on the acquisition. At a time when the government has done nothing about softwood, very clearly, this is an area where we would have some leverage with the Bush administration.

Government Orders

What happened? The Investment Act in theory allows for that due diligence. It allows for public hearings because thousands of British Columbians expressed real concern about this acquisition and were opposed to it. The environmental and safety record for Kinder Morgan is appalling, in some cases involving deaths, environmental fines and repeated safety violations and environmental violations. The government simply refused to look at the public interest, refused to listen to British Columbians, and simply refused to do its work.

Yes, the amendments call for some provision for a public interest review process for mergers and acquisitions in the transportation sector. However, given the lack of due diligence overall of the government, it is very clear to us that regardless of whether or not there was some framework put into place, the government refined a rubber-stamp process that would override the public interest. So we have some skepticism about that.

Finally, I am very dismayed to see the lack of attention paid to people with disabilities in the amendments in Bill C-44.

We have a transportation infrastructure that is going backwards. The Council of Canadians with Disabilities have left the Ministry of Transport's advisory board in complete frustration because the government has done nothing to enhance accessibility in air transport and rail transport. We are moving backwards when other countries are moving forwards. It is a national shame that the government has done nothing about that.

This is another area where we would be attacking this issue in committee had the government not chosen to sit on this legislation for 10 months. We would be supporting this referral to committee. We would be bringing forward, as is our role in this Parliament, intelligent and effective ways of improving the bill. However, the government has sat on this for 10 months. Also, there is a non-confidence vote tonight.

• (1340)

We know that we will have to look at this in the next Parliament and that is shameful because it did not have to be this way. The government should have acted last month.

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his very helpful intervention in the debate on Bill C-44. I think he made some very important points. In particular, I was impressed with the point he made about effective agencies that enforce consumer legislation but enforce concerns about takeovers and amalgamations of airline companies, about advertising of airlines and those kinds of things, and how he linked that to our concern about Investment Canada and other agencies of the federal government that do not seem to do the job that they are set up to do.

We have seen how the Terasen deal that he mentioned has been solidly opposed by British Columbians who are concerned about what it means for an important natural resource, what it means for a company that was a public company in British Columbia for many years. It is so important, especially when we look at the fact that Terasen has an interest in water systems in some of our major cities.

We have seen 8,000 people in British Columbia file complaints with the B.C. Utilities Commission that decided that public hearings were not necessary. That is another example of a completely ineffective government agency that does not do its job and does not

meet the concerns of citizens, so I am very glad that he raised that in conjunction with the bill.

I am also glad that he raised the situation of Canadians with disabilities because I know that it is something that he has worked hard on in Parliament but also before he was elected to Parliament. I wonder if he might just expand a little more on the concerns that Canadians with disabilities have about our transportation systems and how the bill does nothing to address those concerns.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his comments around Terasen and the government's woeful neglect of due diligence, public process, and responding to the public need in the Terasen sell out. It is not just Terasen. Going beyond that, we have seen 11,000 takeovers of Canadian companies since the government came to power, each one of them rubber stamped.

There were 11,000 rubber stamps. In no case was there due diligence or public hearings around this process, not a single time. It is a fire sale. The sell out of Canada is beyond precedence. When Terasen came up, British Columbians very clearly expressed the view that they had serious concerns about the environmental and safety record of Kinder Morgan, serious concerns about a Bush bagman, who was formally with Enron, purchasing the company, and serious concerns about rate increases and the government just rubber stamping it for the 11,001 time. It is absolutely appalling.

The hon. member's question around disabilities and the concern in the disability community about the lessened access to transportation is a very good question.

Here we have a situation where people with disabilities in the year 2005 have less accessibility than they did in 1997 or 1996. We are moving backwards and that is what is so appalling about this. One would have thought that in Bill C-44 the government would have addressed those serious concerns that are well known. The Council of Canadians with Disabilities has a great reputation and is a well reputed organization that has expressed those concerns directly to this Parliament, as well as to the Minister of Transport. Yet, the government did absolutely nothing to address these concerns. However, at the rate the Liberals are going, they may throw out something, maybe a press release, before the non-confidence vote tonight just to say that they have dealt with it.

• (1345)

Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Burnaby—New Westminster has a lot of complaints about the bill, but he has not made it clear whether the New Democrats will actually be voting in favour of or opposed to the bill. If he can make that clear, it would be much appreciated by the House.

Government Orders

I was not planning on asking a question, but for a New Democrat from British Columbia to get up in the House to lecture any political party on either transportation policy or fiscal and economic policy is laughable.

When the New Democratic Party was in power in British Columbia for a decade, it took us from the fastest growing province in Canada to a have not province. From being a have province with everything booming and growing, coming out of Expo 86, growing in the late 1980s, growing into the 1990s, what happened in British Columbia? We elected New Democrats and our economy went south, and it went south in a huge way.

We became a have not province. We ended up being on the receiving end of benefits from Ottawa and that was because of New Democratic fiscal and economic policies. New Democrats are in the House and have the gall to lecture any political party in the House on fiscal and economic policy. It is laughable.

Given that we are debating transportation policy, I want to say to the member, who delved into provincial politics for 90% of his speech, that the New Democratic Party, his party, was in power in British Columbia for 10 years. There were only two transportation policies even remotely on the radar screen in British Columbia at that time. One was the Island highway, but because of NDP dropping the ball, bungling, scandal and pathetic management, it caused that highway to be twice as expensive as it would have been, which would have freed up hundreds of millions of dollars for other projects. However, his party failed to do the proper homework in developing that project.

The second transportation project in the entire decade of NDP rule in British Columbia was the fast ferry fiasco, the joke, where over \$400 million went to ferries that did not work at all. They were an environmental disaster, a mechanical disaster, and turned out to be a fiscal and economic disaster for taxpayers in British Columbia. That was \$400 million that could have gone to substantive policy changes including: the Kicking Horse Canyon and the lives that have been lost there; improvements to the problems with the Sea to Sky Highway; the problems in the northeast sector; rapid transit; and all the things he is talking about. He is great at pointing out all the problems, but when it comes to New Democrats having the opportunity to solve problems, his party failed miserably in British Columbia.

Would the hon. member stand up and explain why his party was so pathetic in government?

Mr. Peter Julian: With pleasure, Mr. Speaker. I would be very pleased to address the concerns, but first, if the hon. member had actually listened, I mentioned three times what our position was on the bill and three times I think is enough. He can check the blues if he does not want to listen.

It is funny because the hon. member who just spoke actually sees most of his federal riding now represented provincially by New Democrats. What he is doing now is standing in the House and criticizing the electors of his communities who chose to elect a New Democrat, among the 33 New Democratic Party MLAs who now sit in the B.C. legislature. They chose to make those choices and he is criticizing his own electors. Since he seems to oppose his own electors so vehemently, that may be an inkling of what is to come in

the next few weeks, so he should be very prudent about the kinds of things he says in the House.

I should also mention that I understand the Conservatives are kind of fiscally challenged, but the record deficits we have seen in British Columbia come from the Gordon Campbell government. There are record deficits beyond belief in British Columbia. There were balanced budgets handed over to the Gordon Campbell regime and Gordon Campbell has left us with record deficits. There seems to be a contradiction.

If the hon. member is very concerned about deficits, he should be looking at who did the worst job. The balanced budgets of the NDP, which were handed over to Gordon Campbell's government, or the record deficits that we have seen from the B.C. Liberals.

We are seeing with the Olympics now, hundreds of millions of dollars in cost overruns, as he knows very well, that were not raised when the initial Olympic requisition was put forward. Now we are seeing from this management, hundreds of millions of dollars of further funds required.

It is not surprising why the member is fiscally challenged. He knows very well, as we know in this corner of the House, that the Department of Finance has actually analysed fiscal period returns from all major political parties from 1981 to 2001. The worst financial record, based on the actual fiscal period returns of provincial and federal governments, actually belongs to the Liberal Party. It has the worst record of financial management fiscal period returns of any of the political parties in Canada. The second worst record belongs to the Conservative Party administration, federal and provincial.

The best record in financial management, based on the fiscal period returns, and we are not talking about budget, we are talking about fiscal period returns, belongs to the New Democratic Party. It is important for the public to know this. Not only are we good and effective on social programs but we are also the best financial managers in the country.

● (1350)

Ms. Marlene Catterall (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I pre-warned you, this is my last speech in the House of Commons after 17 years and I trust you will not be tough on relevance to the topic at hand.

It was 29 years ago that I first ran for and was elected to municipal council, and 18 years ago that I first entered the House of Commons as a member of Parliament. They have been fabulous years.

I want to thank all my constituents in Ottawa West—Nepean who have placed their confidence in me through five consecutive elections. I also want to thank the hundreds of volunteers and those who have contributed financially to campaigns. Volunteers are the fuel of our democracy. It is not money, but people who help fight elections and win or lose them. These individuals make democracy work at the grassroots.

I want to thank my staff who have worked unbelievably hard hours for an unbelievably difficult boss and for constituents who are not always friendly, as we all know. They have done this with great goodwill and with a determination to do whatever they can to help when it is needed.

I want to thank my family. Nobody in the House is unaware of the fact that our families pay the price when we have the great privilege of serving in this place. They pay it in time away, missed birthday parties and missed Christmases. They miss a normal relationship with a parent, a child, a granddaughter or daughter.

For all of the above, I thank because serving in this place is a great privilege.

Very few Canadians will ever have the privilege of sitting in this chamber, playing a role in the history of our country and helping shape public policy that creates a country that we will be leaving to coming generations.

When I first walked into the House of Commons as a member of Parliament, I sat in my seat very aware of those who had come before me, those who had helped create a country that is the envy of the world. I was very aware also of my obligations to try to do the same for generations to come, to leave them a better country than I found it.

Parliament is the crucible of the country. Here we hear all the voices of Canada, the east, the west, the north, small communities, large communities, urban communities, rural communities and resource communities. It is here we try to deal with the diversity of our great country and make decisions that will affect all our citizens. It is here that we hopefully resolve differences so we can move forward as a nation.

I have been very privileged to take part in some of the great debates of our time such as the debate on free trade and the debate on how we manage the fiscal policies of the country so we can afford those programs that Canadians want and need.

I have been privileged to see the implementation of the first new national social program in a generation, the national child benefit. I have been privileged to see us address the problems in our health care system and to participate as we tried to address the important environmental issue of climate change. I leave here proud of what I have contributed and proud of the people with whom I have served.

I also leave here with some sadness. In the last 12 years I have not seen one iota of improvement in the representation of women in this chamber. In my view that is one of the greatest democratic deficits we have to address.

I also leave with sadness at the disrepute this place and those who come here to serve have fallen into. I attribute that to repeated criticism and negativity both among us in the House and in the media. It has contributed to an impression that neither this place nor the people who serve here deserve

● (1355)

I have been privileged to work with people from all parties and from all parts of Canada. I know they come here to serve their country and their constituents. They work hard at great personal

sacrifice. Members serve with integrity and with honesty. They do not deserve to be tainted with the brush that belongs to a very small number.

If I have one message to leave the House and Canadians, it is that. The people who serve here and this place deserve our respect. When people lose respect for their institutions, in my view democracy itself is at risk.

I call upon all the members who will return to remember that what people think of this place matters. It matters more than the criticisms we might want to launch, and important as they are, they too are a part of democracy. However, let us not do it at the expense of respect for this place and respect for all members as people.

My father chose this country as his adopted country more than 70 years ago. From the time when I was a little girl, I learned how lucky we were to be Canadians. The first morning I walked into the House of Commons through those great big doors and into the Hall of Honour, as a member of Parliament, I thought of my dad. He had died only a few months before that election. I said to myself, "Okay, daddy, so what is the daughter of a lousy immigrant tailor doing in this place?" The fact that I was able to make that journey and sit in this place is a measure of the value of the country and what it stands for.

I thank all members for the privilege of serving with them and the opportunity of serving my country.

The Deputy Speaker: Let me add my voice to those who have worked with the hon. member. I was a whip at one time when she was the first female whip appointed in this place. It was a pleasure to serve with her and I wish her the very best in whatever the future might bring.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

● (1400)

[English]

KAWARTHA PARTICIPATION PROJECTS

Hon. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Kawartha Participation Projects provides housing and support to people with disabilities in Haliburton, Northumberland, Kawartha Lakes and Peterborough. It is dedicated to enabling people with physical disabilities to live as independently as they choose.

KPP believes that every person is unique, has his or her own distinct values and goals and the right to life, support, a home, respect and dignity. It has houses, geared to income units and apartments. It provides outreach services to adults in their own homes throughout the region.

The volunteers and staff of KPP and the KPP Foundation deserve our respect, support and thanks. They make our community richer by enriching the lives of persons with disabilities and their families.

S. O. 31

UKRAINE

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Michael Ignatieff has been parachuted by the Prime Minister into a Toronto area riding to run for the Liberals. Mr. Ignatieff has repeatedly expressed a disdain for Ukrainians and the independent state of Ukraine. According to Mr. Ignatieff, Ukrainians conjure up images of “embroidered peasant shirts, the nasal whine of ethnic instruments, phoney Cossacks in cloaks and boots”.

Ukrainian Canadians are understandably outraged that the Prime Minister is promoting a candidate who refers to Ukrainians as “little Russians”. It has been almost one year since 1,000 Canadians were deployed as election observers to help foster democracy in independent Ukraine, Europe's second largest state and ancestral homeland for 1.2 million Canadians.

On behalf of the Conservative Party of Canada, I would like to state our unqualified and continuing commitment to freedom, democracy and an independent Ukraine.

* * *

GREATER CHARLOTTETOWN AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to one of the most dedicated members of the Greater Charlottetown Area Chamber of Commerce. Harvey MacKinnon retired earlier this month his post as general manager, ending a distinguished career with the chamber that spanned decades.

I had the pleasure of serving on the board for several years and as president from 1991 to 1992. I found Harvey to be the type of person who could get a terrific job done with very limited resources. He has the uncanny ability to get along with everyone, keep a very positive attitude, get the job done and push ahead the interests of the business community in the greater Charlottetown area. His long term leadership and dedication was recognized in 2003 when he received the prestigious Queen's Jubilee medal.

Harvey certainly has contributed to his work, to Charlottetown and to the policies that aim to improve the quality of life for his fellow citizens. I would ask my fellow members and all Canadians to join me in applauding Harvey's outstanding career and wishing him and his wife Madeline all the best in his retirement.

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[*Translation*]

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Matapédia-Chandler rail line is at considerable risk. The owners of this section of the Gaspé rail line have already indicated their intention to stop all transportation of goods and maintenance service on their rail network.

According to the Canadian Transportation Agency, this section will be sold or dismantled in a year and a half from now. The loss of it will clearly be devastating to the Gaspé. It would not only have a direct effect on the activities on the Chandler-Gaspé section, but it would make it extremely difficult to establish new businesses in the

southern part of the Gaspé, it would threaten the future development of the port of Gaspé and would halt VIA Rail operations as well.

Our region simply cannot afford the loss of its railway network.

The federal government must tell us now, clearly, what it plans to do to enable our region to keep its rail network.

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[*English*]

MEMBER FOR LAMBTON—KENT—MIDDLESEX

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to bid farewell to my colleagues and the constituents of Lambton—Kent—Middlesex.

To the riding association, I certainly have appreciated all the hard work by president, Marilyn Bach, and all the members and executives over the years for faithfully attending the monthly breakfast meetings and being my eyes and ears in the riding.

I thank the volunteers of four successful campaigns for their time, dedication and all the great friendships that have developed. To a very competent campaign manager for my four elections, I thank Dr. Thomas Wolder.

My awesome staff in Ottawa, Chera, Julie, Jessica, and in the riding, Peggy, Lois and Marg, and all the past staff were second to none. We truly were a great team. Their untiring dedication made my work easier.

To my family members, without their support I could not have done my job. Their patience and understanding meant a lot. I look forward to spending more time with all of them, especially my grandsons Zachary and Jordan. Louis has been my rock. I thank my guardian angel, Deb Wiseman.

Last but not least, I thank the constituents in Lambton—Kent—Middlesex. I have enjoyed representing their interests for 12 years.

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● (1405)

ELECTORAL CAMPAIGNS

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House privileged to serve my home of Cambridge-North Dumfries. However, it is with disappointment that I have to draw to members' attention yet more inconsistencies between what the Prime Minister says and what his team actually does.

Ever since the Prime Minister pleaded with Canadians to keep his job, we have seen numerous examples of his going on about how he wants a clean campaign. However, the chair of the Ontario Liberal campaign team has revealed the truth. He has advised all his MPs to spend their money after Christmas because it is going to be a negative campaign and that way they will get a bigger bang for their buck.

Remember the flag-burning TV ads the Liberals used? Or what about the handgun firing straight at television viewers? If that is what the members opposite in the Liberal Party call positive, then I guess they call stealing taxpayers' money redistribution.

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BIONORTH

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this morning I was pleased to open the 12th annual BioNorth, Canada's international biotechnology and life sciences conference and exhibition presented by the Ottawa Life Sciences Council. I am proud to say that the Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto biotech triangle is second in the world only to California's cluster.

This year, BioNorth focuses on the commercialization of Canada's extensive and tremendous level of research. Our government has committed more than \$2 billion over the next five years to sustain Canada's global lead in university-based research.

Thanks to an outstanding business climate, the private sector is now spending more than \$3 billion a year in life sciences R and D and is responsible for over 70,000 Canadian jobs.

Innovation is at the core of Canada's economic success. We are working hard with Canada's entrepreneurs and Canada's investors to secure innovation, growth and prosperity for all Canadians.

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[Translation]

FABORY METRICAN

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, founded in 1947 by a Montrealer who foresaw the move to metric, Fabory Metrican, which manufactures and distributes metric fasteners, is now part of a worldwide distribution network.

The company offers services relating to the three different aspects of fasteners: the product, the fastening technique and the cost effectiveness of operating procedures.

Thanks to the expertise of some fifty employees in Laval, Fabory Metrican can take over the management of the inventories of its clients, including Bombardier, provide expert technical advice and provide on-site delivery according to production schedules.

With sales of \$22 million in Canada, Fabory Metrican helps many companies increase their production and contributes significantly to the labour market and to Laval's economic development.

* * *

[English]

FEDERAL COURT OF CANADA

Hon. Paul DeVillers (Simcoe North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Federal Court has allowed a judicial review application in the case of American war resister, Jeremy Hinzman, on the issue of the legality of the U.S. invasion of Iraq.

Members will recall that Canada refused to join the U.S. in this war because it lacked UN sanction. Many Canadians are now encouraging the Government of Canada to accord similar treatment

S. O. 31

to the U.S. war resisters today as was accorded to the Vietnam war resisters.

I wish to add my support to those so encouraging the government, because I believe there should be no distinction between a person who was avoiding the draft and one who refuses to join an unauthorized war.

[Translation]

In case this is my last statement in this House, I want to take this opportunity to thank the voters of Simcoe North for giving me the honour of representing them in Parliament for four mandates.

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[English]

INCOME TRUSTS

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the whole income trust debacle is such a weird, gripping tale that it has made terms such as “dividend, tax credit, market cap and finance minister” almost part of the pop culture, as in the sentence, “Yes, my parents gave me my dividend tax credit which really helps my market cap, so I should be able to go to the show tonight unless I somehow get it all finance ministered up”.

Just when we thought it could not get any more weird and strange, now the income trust debacle has taken yet another turn, this time toward the RCMP and the Ontario Securities Commission. With published reports saying that large investors may have been tipped off by people in finance, small retail investors are furious and want answers about who knew what when.

The minister's self-serving denials just do not cut it, especially when trading volumes and unit prices shot up just hours before the minister's announcement. On second thought, why does the RCMP not just set up an office right in the PMO so that it can be at the ready for the next Liberal scandal?

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● (1410)

MEMBER FOR ETOBICOKE—LAKESHORE

Hon. Jean Augustine (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to inform the House that I have decided not to seek re-election in the riding of Etobicoke—Lakeshore.

It has been a great privilege to serve Canada and especially the people of Etobicoke—Lakeshore, to whom I am deeply grateful for their 12 years of friendship and unfailing support.

S. O. 31

I want to thank all of my colleagues in Parliament for the tremendous experience of working with them in building a Canada where citizens from every corner of the globe can fulfill their hopes and aspirations. I have enjoyed the many and varied responsibilities with which I have been entrusted.

I owe much to Canada as a black woman who has risen from grassroots engagements to the highest councils of this land. I want to thank my community from coast to coast for their unstinting support of my efforts.

While there is much left to be done, I believe it is time to pass the baton and to explore and embrace other opportunities to serve my fellow citizens. I will miss this place and the many dear friends I have made here. As a proud and committed supporter of our Liberal team, I want to wish its members every success.

* * *

NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on what is almost certainly the last day of this Parliament, I am proud to rise today as a New Democrat and proud of our record here in this place. As we move to the next election, Canadians can be proud that the NDP members of Parliament got something done, and proud that our leader, the member for Toronto—Danforth, is a leader who puts people first and a leader who got results.

This session saw New Democrats pass the first ever NDP budget. We took \$4.6 billion that was destined to end up in the pockets of well-connected friends of Liberals as corporate tax cuts and we turned that money over to affordable housing, reducing tuition, the environment, and foreign aid.

We have been thrust into this election by a Liberal leader who refuses to compromise, so we head to the electorate confident that we did everything we could to get things done in this minority Parliament. We know that more could have been done if it were not for the scandal, the arrogance and the inflexibility of the Liberals and their Prime Minister.

We pay special tribute to the member for Ottawa Centre, who is retiring. He has been an inspiration to all of us.

We intend to return here with more New Democrats to go to bat for Canadians. They can count on that.

* * *

RIDING OF ETOBICOKE—LAKESHORE

Mr. Peter Van Loan (York—Simcoe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the eve of an election, the Prime Minister has shown that the democratic deficit is alive in the Liberal Party of Canada.

It has been almost two decades since Etobicoke—Lakeshore Liberals have been permitted to democratically select a candidate. In 1993, Jean Chrétien appointed the current member to be a candidate, eliminating any democratic nomination process. Now, Liberal headquarters has rigged the nomination of a successor, installing a candidate in a process worthy of the worst corrupt third world dictatorship, according to local Liberals.

Yes, that is the same Michael Ignatieff who has lectured for years about the value of our western freedoms and democracy. Apparently, becoming a Liberal can be severely corrupting to one's principles. At least it took Pierre Trudeau two years to transform from the candidate of individual freedom to the War Measures Act prime minister. Michael Ignatieff has taken mere minutes to abandon democratic values.

Mr. Ignatieff is going to fit well into the Liberal Party. That is, until the voters of Etobicoke—Lakeshore stand up for democracy, freedom and Canada, and reject the Liberal Party's latest affront. That day is coming soon.

* * *

[Translation]

GREY CUP

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, all eyes were on football last night. We were all treated to a spectacular show during the Grey Cup championship game, pitting the Montreal Alouettes against the Edmonton Eskimos.

Many Quebeckers over the past 40 years have played some great games for the Alouettes, but it was quite unique last night to see so many great plays by Quebeckers on both teams at the Grey Cup.

We would have preferred to see the Montreal Alouettes win, but we are happy for the Eskimos, specifically Danny Maciocia, who was the first Canadian Football League coach from Quebec to win the coveted Grey Cup.

Maciocia is from Montreal and was a member of the Alouettes coaching team after a stellar career in minor and inter-scholastic football in Montreal. Everyone remembers him as a proud and determined gentleman. Congratulations to the Eskimos and the Alouettes for such a great game.

* * *

● (1415)

[English]

CONSERVATIVE PARTY OF CANADA

Ms. Rona Ambrose (Edmonton—Spruce Grove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the time for accountability has arrived. After tonight, Canadians will finally be able to hold the Liberals accountable for the missing money, the broken trust and all the broken promises. While the government has been completely preoccupied with power, Canadians have seen their hard-earned tax dollars spent on vote buying.

Hard-working Canadians who pay their taxes and play by the rules want a new government, one that will put the interests of Canadians first. This election will provide Canadians with a chance to tell the Liberals that they have had enough, that they are tired of being forgotten, and that it is finally their turn.

Over the coming weeks, Canadians will learn about our plans to clean up government and strengthen our nation's unity. Canadians know that only the Conservative Party will deliver the change of government that is needed to bring political and democratic accountability to Ottawa. A new team, the youngest and most diverse political party in Canada, with added strength and experience, will replace a culture of entitlement with a culture of accountability.

I would like to ask all Canadians to stand up for change and to stand up for Canada.

* * *

CLARE LAKING

Mr. Russ Powers (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I stand today to pay tribute to Mr. Clare Laking, who passed away this weekend in Toronto. He was one of Canada's five surviving World War I veterans. He was just a few months shy of his 107th birthday.

Mr. Laking served our nation proudly. He was a private with the Canadian Field Artillery's 27th Battery during the first world war. He served in France as a signaller, stringing telephone wire along the trenches. In 1929, he married his wife, the late Helen Patterson. They had two children.

Today, on behalf of all members of the House and indeed all Canadians, I would like to extend our deepest condolences to the family and friends of Mr. Clare Laking and urge all Canadians to follow his example of remembering the fallen.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[*Translation*]

CANADIAN TAXPAYERS FEDERATION

Mr. Peter MacKay (Central Nova, CPC): According to the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, 145 announcements have been made since November 3 totalling the humungous figure of \$24 billion. The federation notes that the money is being diverted to swing ridings.

The Prime Minister can no doubt buy the Liberals, but when is he going to realize—

The Speaker: Order, please. There is a translation problem. Perhaps it has been resolved now.

The hon. member for Central Nova.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter MacKay: Mr. Speaker, I am working on my French.

[*Translation*]

According to the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, 145 announcements have been made since November 3 totalling the humungous figure of \$24 billion. The federation notes that the money is being diverted to swing ridings.

Oral Questions

The Prime Minister can no doubt buy the Liberals, but when is he going to realize that he cannot buy Canadians with billions of dollars and promises he will not necessarily keep?

[*English*]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government's announcements are completely within the most recent fiscal framework.

I want to congratulate the Minister of Indian Affairs and the Prime Minister for the historic meeting in Kelowna last week. It will allow this country to make a huge change for the better in its relationships with aboriginal people.

Let me quote a comment made this weekend when the question was asked of the hon. gentleman which one of these things would he not do, speaking of the spending announcements, he said, "every one of them".

* * *

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. Peter MacKay (Central Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we do it faster, better and more honestly.

According to Ipsos-Reid, Canadians will not be fooled. Sixty per cent of voters believe that the Liberals are "only addressing these issues after years of neglect" and it is a cynical effort to buy votes. It is so bad that even Liberals are speaking out. The member for Sarnia—Lambton said that he was turned off by the spending announcements.

It is this type of typical, frantic, partisan vote buying effort that gave rise to the sponsorship program. Does the Prime Minister really believe that rushing money out the door on the eve of an election will distract Canadians away from his Liberal government's sordid record of waste, mismanagement and corruption?

● (1420)

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me finish that last quote. The question asked of the hon. gentleman on the weekend on CBC radio was with reference to the spending announcements by the government, "Which one of these things would you not do?" The answer from the deputy leader of the Conservative Party was:

Well, we will answer unequivocally none of those things would we cancel, none of these things would we not pursue.

Mr. Peter MacKay (Central Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me repeat, we have a real Conservative platform that Canadians will embrace in this election.

The Prime Minister bragged yesterday that every single penny of the federal government's announcement had been budgeted for. Right. This is despite the fact that the finance minister admitted last Friday that there was over a \$200 million error in the recent mini-budget. Of course, his record on income trusts and predicting surpluses is a bit dodgy anyway.

Christmas is coming and the Prime Minister and his elves have announced a blizzard of spending announcements attempting to buy the votes of Canadians. How many other mistakes and miscalculations has the Liberal government made in the government's attempt to rush out and buy Canadians with—

Oral Questions

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would ask back, how many budgetary surpluses has this government filed? I can tell him. There are five more in the fiscal framework. It is the best fiscal record of any Canadian government since 1867.

Unlike the party opposite, we will stand with the unemployed with new labour market agreements. We will stand with our military in new military equipment. We will stand—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Medicine Hat.

* * *

INCOME TRUSTS

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister is very right. He will stand with the unemployed.

Last week there were a number of published reports alleging possible insider trading on leaked information from the finance minister's office. Here is what one small investor wrote to us:

The latest information was released to a bunch of insiders from Bay Street....I personally lost around \$2000....I believe somebody should be taken to task and end up in jail for insider trading.

Surely the minister understands the need to maintain investor confidence. Why is he not calling in the RCMP? What is he afraid of?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are appropriate independent authorities to supervise and investigate all stock exchange activities and they will decide for themselves, without any interference by either the hon. gentleman or the government whatsoever. I am satisfied that all requirements were honoured.

What we see here on the floor of the House of Commons is like a year ago and all of the wild comments about child pornography and last week and all the wild comments about organized crime. It is just another drive-by smear campaign by the Conservative Party.

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was a \$100 million crime and it was pretty well organized. I do not know what one would call that.

The chief financial officer for the country basically said he would rather cover up for the Liberal Party than protect small investors. That is not acceptable. Here is what another investor wrote:

I want to know who had "advance" warnings on where the government was going on this. Which "insiders" to the Liberal Party had advance information on the surprise early announcement—

That person lost \$5,000. That is what we all want to know. When will the minister stop covering for his—

• (1425)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. gentleman's allegations are false. They are beneath contempt.

[*Translation*]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we have been questioning the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness for a week now about the CIA prison planes, but the Bloc Québécois still does not have an answer. Yet a journalist working for a major daily newspaper was able to obtain the flight logs and conclude that the U.S. prison planes had landed on Canadian soil 55 times over the past four years.

What explanation does the minister have for the fact that she has no information for us, while the media, simply by consulting the flight logs, has been able to answer our questions?

[*English*]

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again let me reiterate for the hon. member, it is my understanding that the flights referred to by the hon. member from the Bloc Québécois were handled in accordance with normal operating procedures. To the best of my knowledge there is no credible information on the flights mentioned to suggest that these planes were used to transport suspected terrorists to and from Canada or that illegal activity took place.

A response to the letter from the Bloc Québécois member is being forwarded to him from me later this afternoon. I have asked that further inquiries be made regarding all the flights in question.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it has been proven that these planes belong to companies owned by the CIA, whose headquarters is a post office box in Washington.

Here is my question to the minister. As Switzerland, Iceland and the Council of Europe have done, has the minister made inquiries of the U.S. government in order to find out if these CIA-owned planes were transporting prisoners? Did she make inquiries?

[*English*]

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, has made it plain that if we have any reasonable evidence or information to suggest that there was wrongdoing in terms of any breach of Canadian domestic law, or international law as far as that goes, the Minister of Foreign Affairs has indicated that he will follow up with his counterpart, the secretary of state for the United States of America.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in response to the exact same question on Friday, the Minister of Foreign Affairs said that he would refer this question to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness or the Minister of Transport. They are passing the ball back and forth, just like in the sponsorship scandal. They do not want to give us an answer. That is the problem.

Oral Questions

So, I am asking her the question. Does she not find it a bit strange that these planes landed at Guantanamo and at Fort Peary, a CIA base in the United States? Could she verify this? We are not talking about New York, Los Angeles or Washington here, but rather about Guantanamo—not a very popular tourist destination.

[English]

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said before, we have no information that would lead us to believe there was any illegal activity in relation to the use of those planes. I have also underscored in the House on a number of occasions that we have absolutely no reason to believe that any plane was used in relation to the practice known as extraordinary rendition.

I will again make it absolutely plain for the hon. member that if any information comes into our possession around illegal activity in relation to planes, we will obviously take that up with the United States of America.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we see this same attitude with regard to the sponsorships. We are told that the rules were followed, that there was no reason to believe that they were not and, if we have any information, to send it to them.

The Liberals are in power. The minister has the duty to verify this information. I am not asking her if she has information. If they do not want to know something, they need only not ask for it. If they do not want to see something, they close their eyes. If they do not want to hear, they turn a deaf ear.

Has the minister made inquiries of the United States in order to find out what these planes were doing in Canada, on their way to Guantanamo? That is the question. Let her answer it.

[English]

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can reassure the hon. member that my officials have followed up in relation to this matter.

As I have said before, we have no credible or reasonable information to suggest that these planes were involved in any illegal activity, and certainly no reliable information that would suggest that they were involved in the practice of extraordinary rendition.

If my officials were to raise those kinds of serious questions, if I received information that suggested to me such actions were taking place, my colleague the Minister of Foreign Affairs would obviously follow up with the Secretary of State for the United States of America.

* * *

•(1430)

TERASEN INC.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what is clear is the last thing the government wants is to find out any information from Canadians. It is not interested in finding out the truth. Here is another example.

The Prime Minister knows that Terasen Gas is up for sale. It is going to be sold to Americans, and yet no public hearings are being held. Again it is a question of the Liberals shutting their eyes to reality. Another piece of Canada is about to be sold off.

Our gas and water assets are being sold off to Americans. A minister last week said that the sale was a good thing. Could the Prime Minister tell us what is good about selling off a piece of Canada?

[Translation]

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the information the hon. member has is incorrect. There is absolutely no question of selling our natural resources. They still belong to this country, to the province of British Columbia.

That said, we have reviewed every aspect of the case and under the Investment Canada Act, we find that this will provide significant dividends to everyone in British Columbia and Alberta. We have therefore agreed to the transaction.

* * *

[English]

HEALTH

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government clearly does not know what is going on. We are talking about the sale of a natural gas distribution system and drinking water systems that provide water to Canadians.

It is the same thing with health care. We see the creeping Americanization of health care. In British Columbia clinics have opened up. They charge \$1,200 to join and \$2,300 a year to stay a part of the system. This is the Liberals' approach to waiting lists. It is called buying one's way to the front.

Why did the Prime Minister not come clean on the whole issue of privatization of health care in the last election?

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want the leader of the NDP to know that for the last 10 years every year one province or the other has been penalized under the Canada Health Act, and we shall continue to do so. I want the hon. leader of the NDP to know that we have invested \$41 billion in health care over the next 10 years.

I want him to know that he ran away from working with us to strengthen public health care into the lap of the Tories whose sole aim is to actually gut health care and end federal owned health care. I would ask him to be accountable to the people of Canada on that.

* * *

INCOME TRUSTS

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here is how one banker described the Liberal income trust scandal in the *Financial Post*:

The government has leaked this out to their friends and cronies in the business community and...panicked the little investors who sold. It's brutal. It's third world. It's unbelievable. The government then tells a bunch of Bay Street insiders what it is going to do so they can profit. And then it does it. It's insane.

Oral Questions

The Liberal culture of entitlement is all about benefiting powerful insiders at the expense of ordinary Canadians. Why did powerful Liberal insiders benefit yet again from access to information that should have been secret?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. gentleman's allegations are again flatly false. I do not think I need to take any lessons from a member of this House who believes that his patron saint is Conrad Black.

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that would be the same Conrad Black who gave the Prime Minister a \$50,000 leadership contribution, I guess.

The finance minister is responding in the same way the Liberals do at the beginning of every Liberal scandal: to deny. But how can the finance minister be so sure? Market activity tripled in certain stocks in the course of two hours before his announcement was made. Al Rosen, a leading forensic accountant, says "clearly there was a leak some time between...2 and 4".

The question for the finance minister is, who knew what in his office? Has he made an enquiry in his own office? If not, how can he be so sure there was no leak?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for the good of the nation, it is very good news that the hon. gentleman is not in charge of stock exchanges. In fact, there are the appropriate authorities that are in place for that purpose. They provide the supervision. They provide the investigation. They will do whatever they believe is necessary to be done.

•(1435)

Mr. Peter Van Loan (York—Simcoe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there once was a practice, long abandoned under the Liberal government, of the finance minister resigning if budget contents leaked, this on the principle that inside information should not allow those connected to government to profit. Now leaks are common, in part because budget-type announcements come almost weekly instead of yearly from a government that has abandoned normal prudent fiscal practice.

The Prime Minister has just proposed restoring traditional ministerial accountability as proof that he is going to clean up corruption. Will it apply in the case of the recent reports of insider trading on tax changes? Or was the Prime Minister just kidding when he announced the return of the ministerial accountability principle?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is there are no credible allegations. In fact, the opposition is trading in its usual pre-election process fluff. There is nothing to the suggestions that those members have put before this House.

Mr. Peter Van Loan (York—Simcoe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians will not be surprised if the Prime Minister's latest promises on cleaning up corruption have the life span of a fruit fly. After all, there is a lot rotten in the government.

The Minister of Finance created the uncertainty in the markets with ill-considered comments in the first place. Then, according to Al Rosen, who is among the most respected finance experts, there is evidence that some people had inside knowledge of the minister's new tax policy in advance of the public and profited.

Will the Minister of Finance take responsibility for this situation? Or is there still, in the words of Justice Gomery, a "refusal of ministers...to acknowledge their responsibility"?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to note that Judge Gomery said, in relation to my activities as Minister of Public Works, that in fact I set the "standard" that should have been applied in that particular file. I appreciate that comment from Judge Gomery.

* * *

[Translation]

KYOTO PROTOCOL

Mr. Guy Côté (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the federal government wants to impose its conditions and choose Quebec's environmental projects while, from 1970 to 1999, Ottawa spent \$66 billion on oil, gas and coal development and a measly \$329 million on clean energy such as wind energy.

The agreement should be based on the model used for the municipal infrastructure program under which Quebec has the last word on the choice of projects.

How does this government have the nerve to tell Quebec what to do?

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we intend to work together with the provinces to combat global warming.

The environment is a shared jurisdiction. Intense negotiations are ongoing and we still hope to reach agreements with all the provinces.

Mr. Guy Côté (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we have learned that Ottawa wants to select from projects presented by the municipalities and towns of Quebec. It is this paternalistic attitude that has caused the public to lose confidence in this government.

Does the government intend to step back, drop its paternalistic approach and let Quebec call the shots on this agreement which comes under its jurisdiction and applies to its own territory?

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is opportunism by the Bloc, which wants to trigger an election to prevent us from addressing issues of great importance to Quebecers and other Canadians.

We are prepared to continue negotiating with all of the provinces to reach an agreement so that we can work together to tackle the major challenge of global warming.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL AID

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister claims to have put a great deal of money into international aid. His friend Bono does not share that opinion.

Oral Questions

When the Liberals took power in 1993, Canadian aid represented 0.44% of the gross domestic product. Despite all the PM's fine words, the figure has dropped to 0.30%. It is very difficult, under such circumstances, to trust this government.

Can the Prime Minister admit that this is a pretty substantial drop for someone who had promised to do far more and far better?

[*English*]

Hon. Aileen Carroll (Minister of International Cooperation, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think it is important to note that this government increased the development budget by 8% last year and 8% this year. In fact, in the end it has given more than that. This will mean that our aid budget will have doubled by the year 2010. I also have spoken in the House about the effectiveness of our aid. I also am absolutely appalled by the criticism that comes from a party that voted against Bill C-48, which hugely increased our aid budget.

• (1440)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, if the Prime Minister and the minister are really serious, can they commit to Canada's attaining the target figure set by the UN because at the rate things are going, that will not happen until 2035?

[*English*]

Hon. Aileen Carroll (Minister of International Cooperation, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has made it eminently clear that he will reach the 0.7%. He has said that publicly and he intends to do so, but like all other ways in which he approaches issues like this, he is fiscally very prudent. He has made it clear that when he can reach it and when he has a plan to get there, he will make that a very public matter.

I think we must be mindful of the fact that Canada's reputation for disbursing that which it pledges is sterling. There are sometimes questions about other countries that set dates and make pledges that are not always met.

* * *

[*Translation*]

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Public Works and Government Services wants to convince us that the Liberal Party of Canada has paid back to the taxpayers every red cent that was illegally received. According to Justice Gomery, however, \$40 million is still missing, and no one knows where it is.

The election is approaching. A Conservative government will doggedly pursue the Liberal Party in order to recover the millions of dollars that have disappeared from the public purse. Why does this Liberal government not manifest that same desire?

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not know if there is some sort of sickness going the rounds of the Conservative Party, but they are making up a lot of stories these days. Its leader invented the fact that Justice Gomery had made reference to organized crime, and now this member is trying to invent the fact that Justice Gomery said there was \$40 million

missing. Both are lying, and both have created these stories out of whole cloth.

[*English*]

Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what we have said is that the Liberal approach to cleaning up the sponsorship mess has been more talk than action. The Liberals talked about paying back the stolen money. Justice Gomery said that \$40 million was stolen. The Liberals say they have paid back \$1 million. Only the most blind Liberal partisan can believe that Liberal math.

The Liberals said that they were going to go after the people who got the stolen money, but the Prime Minister has not held accountable any one of the eighteen Liberal candidates who in 1997 got illegal, stolen sponsorship cash. Why has the Liberal approach to the sponsorship program been so much talk and so little action? Do taxpayers not deserve better?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the fact is that the Liberal Party of Canada has paid back every penny received inappropriately as a result of these activities. Furthermore, the analysis was conducted based on Justice Gomery's facts.

The Conservatives can work with the separatists and pull figures out of the air to try to besmirch the reputation of good people who are involved in political life, but the fact is that our analysis is based on Justice Gomery. We trust Justice Gomery, not the separatists and the Conservatives.

* * *

CHINESE CANADIANS

Mr. John Cummins (Delta—Richmond East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for years the Conservative Party has been working for a just redress of the injustice done to Chinese Canadians by the infamous head tax.

Last week, as part of its flurry of bogus pre-election promises, the government announced a \$2.5 million payment to one group, angering many others who felt excluded, including the coalition of head tax payers, and leaving out surviving head tax payers themselves.

Why did the government rush this announcement that has ended up causing divisions in the Chinese community rather than working to create a consensus?

Hon. Raymond Chan (Minister of State (Multiculturalism), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are so many non-factual issues in the hon. member's question. First of all, it is the opposition party's proposal in the draft legislation that asks to talk to one group only. In the agreement we have signed, we have the support of SUCCESS in Vancouver and the cultural centre in Toronto. We have the support of the Montreal cultural centre and many, many other groups across the country in the Chinese community, so we did not deal with just one group.

*Oral Questions***MULTICULTURALISM**

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians of Ukrainian ancestry are protesting the recent nomination of Liberal candidate Mr. Michael Ignatieff. Mr. Ignatieff refers to Ukrainians as little Russians and talks about the disdain he has for Ukrainians—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I will get to the point. Mr. Ignatieff said that “Ukrainian independence conjures up images of peasant embroidered shirts, the nasal whine of ethnic instruments”.

Canada is a country that is tolerant and multicultural. Will the minister join with me in condemning the remarks of Michael Ignatieff?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

• (1445)

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Davenport.

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JUSTICE

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada.

This past summer saw a dramatic increase in firearms-related violence in the city of Toronto. This is of considerable concern for the residents of Canada's largest city.

Could the Minister of Justice tell us what initiatives are being undertaken to address the issue of increased gun violence?

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Friday I introduced 12 legislative amendments to the Criminal Code, part of a three-pronged strategy to combat gun-related and gang-related violence. This is to send as well a strong denunciatory message that such crimes will be treated seriously.

Law is only one part of the response. We are also seeking more effective law enforcement and resources to combat the roots of crime as well as the crime itself.

* * *

INCOME TRUSTS

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians have very legitimate concerns about possible insider trading before the income trust announcements last week. Surely, Al Rosen, respected forensic accountant, cannot be dismissed as engineering a smear campaign.

I want to ask the finance minister, since I believe that he sees himself as a very honourable man and a very principled person, if he would not agree to clear the air, call for an immediate investigation and tell us today who will head that investigation.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are appropriate, independent authorities that supervise and investigate all stock exchange activities. They will decide for themselves, without any political advice from this House or anyone else, what is the appropriate course of action to take.

CANADA PENSION PLAN

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if the minister will not take these concerns seriously, I hope the RCMP will.

Let me ask the minister about another serious matter and that really is the state of the Canadian pension system following 12 years of inaction by the Liberals. Now, out of the void, we have the Prime Minister's old crony David Dodge, at the Bank of Canada, musing publicly about investing our pensions in controversial public-private partnerships and advocating more abuses of worker pension surpluses.

Why is the government not speaking out or does the Liberal government not believe in standing up for Canadian workers and their pension security?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pension security is very, very important. That is why, for example, we now have a consultation process under way with respect to defined benefit plans, which we hope will point to some interesting and important directions for the future.

With respect to the hon. member's allusions to Governor Dodge from the Bank of Canada, I would point out to her that her comments are indeed outrageous, and that it was Governor Dodge, when he was deputy minister of finance, who indeed helped make sure that the Canada pension plan is actuarially sound for the next 75 years.

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INCOME TRUSTS

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the finance minister keeps ducking and dodging. His feigned indignation just does not cut it.

I do not want to talk about the Toronto Stock Exchange. I want to talk about the finance minister's office and his fiduciary obligation to ensure that no confidential information was leaked that would allow insiders to benefit. Here is my very simple question, once again: why will the minister not at least question people in his own office to ensure that they respected those confidences?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am satisfied that members of my office and members of the staff of the Department of Finance have conducted themselves appropriately within all the rules and regulations.

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that was a very clever evasion, but he did not answer the question. The finance minister has an obligation. We are talking about ensuring that there is confidence in Canada's capital markets. However, we cannot have that confidence while these allegations hang over his department and his head.

If the minister himself is not prepared to simply question people in his own department about whether or not they were involved in leaking information, when will he bring in the RCMP to conduct a proper investigation?

Oral Questions

●(1450)

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have indicated that I am satisfied with respect to those matters. I have also indicated that there is an appropriate investigative authority, the Ontario Securities Commission, and it will do what it needs to do in the circumstances. That is its job.

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CHILD CARE

Ms. Rona Ambrose (Edmonton—Spruce Grove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, why is the government so afraid to let women make their own child care choices? The government is trying to dictate the choices of women and it is telling women across the country that they are not capable of making their own decisions with their own money.

The Conservative Party believes that women should be treated equally. Our child care program is progressive, flexible and universal and will empower all women equally. We have no doubt that Canadian women can make their own choices in child care.

When will the government start respecting the choices women want to make for themselves?

Hon. Ken Dryden (Minister of Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have mentioned in the House a few times before, if we went back 19 months, in terms of child care in the country very little was happening and nothing foreseeable was going to happen until the government made the promise of \$5 billion over five years to Canadians. Since the House convened 13 months ago, all we have heard from the other side are words, games and noise. From this side there has been action: 10 provinces, 10 agreements.

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JUSTICE

Mr. Vic Toews (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the justice minister has repeatedly stated his personal opposition to mandatory prison sentences for violent crimes. Now, on the eve of a federal election, he embraces mandatory prison sentences because his polling shows 82% of Canadians support these measures.

Why does the minister continue to insult victims of crime and those affected by gun violence by producing legislation as a meaningless public relations exercise only when he knows it cannot pass?

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the one thing I will not do is exploit victims of crime. What I did was respond to the unanimous recommendation from the federal-provincial-territorial ministers of justice meeting in November. I said that I would move with all deliberate speed to table legislation, and that is exactly what I did.

* * *

[Translation]

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when the Gomery report was tabled on November 1, Jean Chrétien told the media that he had instructed

the ministers on the Treasury Board to make sure everything was in order and had been told that there was no problem.

Could the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, who was the President of the Treasury Board at the time, confirm that such an instruction was given by Jean Chrétien and that she told him that everything was OK?

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Justice Gomery's findings should not be rewritten here. On page 430 of his report, Justice Gomery himself wrote, "Mr. Martin, ... is entitled, like other Ministers in the Quebec caucus, to be exonerated from any blame for carelessness or misconduct". That sounds pretty clear to me. It is very clear indeed.

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, either the minister can confirm Jean Chrétien's allegation that he was assured by the Treasury Board that all was well, which would indicate that, like the Prime Minister, she closed her eyes and condoned the whole thing, or she is telling us that Mr. Chrétien lied. Which is it? Who is telling the truth?

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think that the hon. member is a little hard of hearing. Justice Gomery is telling the truth, and he said that the Prime Minister was entitled, like other ministers in the Quebec caucus, to be exonerated from any blame for carelessness or misconduct.

Bloc members cannot stand it, because they have been engaged in a smear campaign. They have been out to smear reputations, and Justice Gomery contradicts them. They cannot stand it. They should read the report over and over. There is one truth, and that is the truth spoken by Justice Gomery.

* * *

●(1455)

[English]

INCOME TRUSTS

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I find the finance minister's nonplussed reaction to this evident leak of information from his office very peculiar indeed because we have bankers, investors, market watchers, forensic auditors all saying that there was at least the appearance of a leak. Many of them say that there was clearly a leak that resulted in massive trading that benefited powerful insiders.

Why does the minister have no curiosity about this? Why has he not asked questions himself? Is he afraid of being held accountable for the leak in his department?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, let us be clear. There is no evidence of a leak. There is an allegation on this, particularly from the opposition.

The hon. gentleman asked if I inquired within my staff and within my department. Indeed I did, and I am satisfied that all requirements were met. Beyond that, if there is further study that is required here, that is the prerogative of the Ontario Securities Commission without any political advice from across the way.

*Oral Questions***HEALTH**

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are still waiting to see real action on the health care wait times. The benchmark should have been announced ages ago. The government is going to die in a few hours. The promised fix for a generation has turned out to be the biggest broken promise in a generation.

Will the government finally announce the health care waiting benchmarks or will it be another promise made, promise broken?

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is quite ironic that we were going to announce those wait times benchmarks in December. All opposition parties now want to go into an election campaign and then they ask where are the wait time benchmarks. They are coming.

For the hon. member, we shall take no lessons on health care from a party which interest is to maximize private health care. The member himself is on record saying that we should not be hung up on universality. We are going to stand up for universality in public health care in Canada.

* * *

HUMAN RESOURCES AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada is one of the very few countries in the world to show leadership and to offer compassionate care benefits for workers. The government recently recognized the opportunity to address the issue of the definition of caregiver and to offer hope to those Canadians in time of need.

Could the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development please tell the House the update as to the expected changes for this very important program?

Hon. Belinda Stronach (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and Minister responsible for Democratic Renewal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government has recognized that we can make improvements to compassionate care to reach more Canadians.

I am pleased to inform the House that we have made significant improvements to the compassionate care benefit. The benefit will be expanded beyond immediate family members. Starting next January, Canadians will now be able to designate a person of their choice to care for them. This means not only temporary income support, but also job security. This is great news for Canadians.

* * *

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Mr. Paul Forsyth (New Westminster—Coquitlam, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government designed and executed ad scam for the benefit of the Liberal Party. At least 565 individuals and groups were involved in the scheme over many years. The Liberals claimed that they made a down payment on the money stolen from taxpayers, with a \$1.14 million pay back cheque to the Government of Canada.

To be sure that the Liberals are telling the truth this time, will the government release a copy of both sides of the cancelled down

payment cheque that is supposed to have been received from the Liberal Party?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, members have reached a new low over there. The fact is the Liberal Party of Canada has paid every penny received inappropriately back to the Canadian taxpayer, based on an analysis of Justice Gomery's report. At the end of the day, we Liberals stand with Canadians who believe in the work and the analysis of Justice Gomery who heard from 172 witnesses and reviewed over 28 million pages of documents.

Justice Gomery is interested in getting to the truth. That is what Canadians want. They do not want to go to the polls, which is all the Conservatives want.

* * *

● (1500)

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Ms. Helena Guergis (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on top of its culture of entitlement, the government has earned a reputation for its culture of secrecy.

Ms. Rosemary Ur: What about your jewellery?

Ms. Helena Guergis: The access to information commissioner has noted that the federal government remains seized with a culture of distrust and resistance to the law that is supposed to give the public access to government documents. Canadians want to get to the bottom of Liberal corruption.

Could the current government assure us that should Canadians vote for a change of government in the next election, there will be no systematic shredding of documents and destruction of records?

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, should such a—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. I am trying to get a little order so we can all hear the minister. The President of the Treasury Board has the floor. The hon. member for Simcoe—Grey is anxious to hear the answer. I cannot hear the answer and he is sitting closer to me than he is to her. We will have a little order.

Hon. Reg Alcock: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry, I missed the reference to jewellery. Let me repeat my comment, should such an unlikely circumstance come to pass, the government will respect all policies as it always does.

* * *

[Translation]

HEALTH

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health announced on November 18 that his government and the legal representatives of individuals infected by the hepatitis C virus before 1986 and after 1990 had reached an agreement. The agreement concerns only the submission of technical data, and nothing conclusive has been negotiated with regard to compensation.

Points of Order

Will the Minister of Health admit that his November 18 press release is nothing more than hokum, that no victim of hepatitis C has been compensated and that no significant agreement has been signed to date?

[English]

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the agreement we have reached with the lawyers for the class of pre-1986 and post-1990 is substantial. That agreement says two things. Here are some steps that we need to take to get the evidence to determine the class, the size of the class, the status of the class. Then, at the end of that process there shall be compensation for that class. That is absolute advancement from the previous propositions that we had.

* * *

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Hon. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on November 17, the House passed Bill S-3, which confirms the Government of Canada's obligations to promote linguistic duality. On November 22, the Senate did likewise.

My question is for the Minister responsible for Official Languages. When will Bill S-3 come into effect in order to protect Canada's language minorities? Could he answer my question, as this is likely the last question I will ever ask in this House?

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Minister for Internal Trade, Deputy Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Minister responsible for Official Languages and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question and for sponsoring Bill S-3.

It is my pleasure to inform the House that the bill received Royal Assent last Thursday. It is now law.

Our support of this bill signals our government's ongoing commitment to Canada's linguistic minorities. This is in contrast to the attitude of the Bloc, which claims to be supporting anglophone and francophone minorities and then turns its back on Bill S-3. A sorry sight.

* * *

[English]

ELECTORAL REFORM

Mrs. Carolyn Parrish (Mississauga—Erindale, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, on this my last day in the House, I would like to ask when will Canadians, particularly the 10% who support smaller parties and independent candidates, see their votes really count in a modern system that includes proportional representation and fixed election dates?

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Minister for Internal Trade, Deputy Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Minister responsible for Official Languages and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the member will know, the government called for proposals to engage Canadians in a very thorough process of consultation so we will know what Canadians expect from their institutions and what values they wish reflected in their parliamentary institutions.

Only when we know what Canadians want to see, will this government move on that. We will then take the time to do it right.

* * *

● (1505)

POINTS OF ORDER

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES (A), 2005-06

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to provide further information to the House on the point of order raised by the member for Edmonton—St. Albert on November 23, 2005, concerning the supplementary estimates.

The member essentially raised two concerns, one dealing with Service Canada and a second concern dealing with Downsview Park.

Let me first address the issue of Service Canada. As the member pointed out, Service Canada is not included in the supplementary estimates (A) and from this observation, he comes to the erroneous conclusion that the estimates are not properly before the House. If I understand the member's argument correctly, he suggested that the government has created a new department and that no moneys expended through Service Canada have been included in the estimates.

The member is mistaken on both points. Service Canada is not a department under the Financial Administration Act, FAA, or any other framework statutes governing the Public Service, nor has it been referred to as such by the government. Rather, Service Canada is a horizontal initiative for the delivery of services and programs associated with departments from across the government.

No new department has been created. Rather, employees and resources of current departments, notably the Department of Social Development and the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development remain in their own departments. To ensure one stop access for Canadians and to ensure integrated management of this innovative horizontal initiative, these public servants are now under a common management team led by the deputy minister for Service Canada.

However, it is important to note that this deputy minister is not a deputy minister for the purposes of the Financial Administration Act as the member has erroneously suggested. Rather, the deputy ministers of the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development and the Department of Social Development have delegated their responsibilities under the Financial Administration Act in respect of services provided by Service Canada to the deputy minister for Service Canada.

Points of Order

Although the member cited order in council PC 2005-1609 for the proposition that the deputy minister for Service Canada is a deputy minister with her own department, he did not say that under the order in council the deputy minister for Service Canada is cross-appointed as an associate deputy minister to the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development and Social Development Canada.

This reflects the accountability regime that I have just outlined and allows this deputy minister to have horizontal operational responsibility for this important initiative. Given that Service Canada is not a department but rather a horizontal initiative, there is no separate entry in the estimates for Service Canada.

Rather, services provided under this initiative, such as the delivery for example of old age security benefits and the Canada pension plan, are fully accounted for in the estimates of the partner departments I mentioned earlier. To sum up, the hon. member asked two questions to which there are clear answers.

First, where is the legislation authorizing the department of Service Canada? There is such department. Statutory authority for the programs delivered through Service Canada is found in the relevant departmental statutes and program statutes.

Second, where are the Service Canada estimates? They are found in the estimates of the partner departments whose services are being provided through the Service Canada initiative.

There is no affront to Parliament as was suggested by the member. Rather, the government has taken existing programs and expenditures, all fully authorized by Parliament, and has brought them under a horizontal management model that respects both Parliament and the Financial Administration Act.

To include Service Canada in the supplementary estimates would be an improper use of the estimates process, as it would be an example of legislating through the estimates.

• (1510)

On March 22, 2004 the Speaker commented on the practice used during previous governmental reorganizations. The Speaker pointed out that:

—the government may request funds only for programs and activities that have already received parliamentary approval. It may not present in the estimates, requests for departments, agencies or activities which have not yet been granted the appropriate legislative authority by Parliament.

The Speaker concluded that:

The Main Estimates reflect the existing structure of government at the time that they are presented to the House.

Therefore, the exclusion of Service Canada in the supplementary estimates is consistent with the established rules and practices of the House.

Turning to the Downsview Park question, there appear to be two issues again. One issue is the use of one dollar items to carry out transactions. The second issue is whether the transfer of land from one department to another federal entity should form part of the estimates.

With respect to the one dollar items, one dollar items are used in supplementary estimates to seek an alteration in the existing

allocation of funds as authorized in the main estimates. They do not seek new or additional funds, but rather reallocate existing spending authorities between votes or provide appropriate authorities. The introduction to supplementary estimates makes this process clear, and it is a practice that has been recognized and followed by successive Parliaments.

Provision for the forgiveness of debts owned by crown corporations is specifically set out in section 24 of the Financial Administration Act, which specifies that “no debt or obligation shall be forgiven in whole or in part otherwise than by or under an Act of Parliament, including an appropriation Act”.

As the Speaker ruled in 1981, the government recognizes that there be no legislating through the estimates.

The creation of a one dollar item, in vote 4a in National Defence for debt forgiveness and a non-budgetary one dollar item, and vote L13a in Office of Infrastructure Canada for the establishment of a borrowing authority, specifically set out in section 101 of the Financial Administration Act, is consistent with the principles outlined above.

With respect to point two, the Auditor General, in her November 2003 report, concluded that the government had addressed the issues raised about Downsview Park's accountability to Parliament and the shortcomings in its corporate structure.

However, the Auditor General, in her November 2004 report, pointed out that:

—the Government of Canada has not requested—and accordingly Parliament has not provided—clear and explicit authority to create and operate an urban park, an initiative that Parc Downsview Park Inc. has undertaken...Furthermore, Parliament has not authorized the related spending of public funds.

On May 19, 2005, the government reconfirmed its previous decision to use part of the Downsview lands for the development of a park and authorized the transfer of specific parcels of land from the Department of National Defence to Downsview Park.

It was considered important to assign a transfer value, while ensuring that parliamentarians had an appreciation of the true value of the asset being transferred to Downsview Park. Accordingly, the government decided that the transfer would take place at net book value, which is the accounting treatment in the books of the government. The government placed a line item in the estimates, as urged by the Auditor General, to ensure that this action was transparent and therefore approved by Parliament.

The Auditor General, in her November 2005 report, stated that:

If the government's decisions of May 2005 are implemented, matters that we have previously brought to Parliament's attention would be resolved. Notably, Parliament's approval for the transfer of the Downsview lands and the financing of the park would be obtained.

In order to ensure complete transparency and to meet the request from the Auditor General, the financial informational components related to the transfer of the land from the Department of National Defence to Downsview Park are being presented to Parliament for approval and not for any mandate authority for such a transfer.

The Auditor General has indicated that she is satisfied with the proposed mechanism in the supplementary estimates which shows that land has in fact been transferred from the Department of National Defence to Downsview Park at no net cost to the corporation.

•(1515)

Accordingly, the government has taken the necessary action, through the inclusion in supplementary estimates (A) 2005-06 of a non-budgetary vote, L11a, in the Office of Infrastructure of Canada to address this outstanding issue.

I therefore submit that the use of one dollar items for Downsview Park in the supplementary estimates conforms to the established rules and practices that have guided this House.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. parliamentary secretary for his very thorough review of all the material that he felt was relevant to the point of order raised by the hon. member for Edmonton—St. Albert. I will take his submissions under advisement and, assuming the House is sitting the rest of the week, I will try to get back to the House later this week with a ruling on this very important issue that was raised by the hon. member for Edmonton—St. Albert.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, thank you for acknowledging the thoroughness of that important response.

Pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 20 petitions.

* * *

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. Greg Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34, I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian delegation of the Canada-U.S. Interparliamentary Group respecting its participation at the National Governors Association 2005 annual meeting in Des Moines, Iowa, from July 15-18.

I would also like to present to the House, in both official languages, the report respecting the Canada-U.S. Interparliamentary Group at the Council of State Governments, Eastern Regional Conference, 45th annual meeting at Montville, Connecticut from July 25-28.

* * *

•(1520)

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Paul Steckle (Huron—Bruce, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour this afternoon to present to this House, in both official

Routine Proceedings

languages, the final report “Financial analysis relative to meat packing companies in the context of the BSE crisis of 2003”.

This is the 10th report from this committee. I believe this report will verify what Canadians have long come to believe, that the packers made exorbitant profit on the backs of Canadians, not only the primary producers but certainly the consumers of Canada. We are glad that this report has been presented before this House adjourns.

JUSTICE, HUMAN RIGHTS, PUBLIC SAFETY AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Mr. John Maloney (Welland, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 18th report of the Standing Committee on Justice, Human Rights, Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

In accordance with the orders of reference of June 7 and June 27, and its mandate under Standing Order 108(1), the committee has established a subcommittee with a mandate to examine the process for appointments to the federal judiciary and make recommendations for reform.

I wish to thank the member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, chair of the subcommittee, for bringing forward this initiative, and also the members of the subcommittee and the standing committee for their contributions.

I also have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 19th report of the Standing Committee on Justice, Human Rights, Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

In accordance with the order of reference of Wednesday, May 4, the committee has considered Bill C-215, an act to amend the Criminal Code (consecutive sentence for use of firearm in commission of offence), and agreed on Monday, November 28 to report it with amendments.

STATUS OF WOMEN

Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fifth report of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, entitled “Interim Report on the Maternity and Parental Benefits Under Employment Insurance: The Exclusion of Self-Employed Workers”.

During the course of its study, the committee heard compelling evidence from groups that represent the broad diversity of the self-employed in Canada. The committee heard the perspective of low income self-employed workers such as cleaners and home child care providers, and also from self-employed workers in higher income groups such as lawyers and entrepreneurs.

Given the range of witnesses consulted, it is indeed very telling that all the witnesses who appeared before the committee maintained that maternity and parental benefits should indeed be extended to self-employed workers. Given the changing realities in the Canadian workplace and the importance of investing in our children, the committee urges immediate action to ensure that self-employed workers are made eligible for maternity and parental benefits including employment insurance benefits.

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

Routine Proceedings

[Translation]

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

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 11th report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities regarding the 2004-05 report on the implementation of the Centennial Flame Research Award Act.

* * *

[English]

EXCISE TAX ACT

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-458, An Act to amend the Excise Tax Act (no excise tax on fuel for farmers and fishermen).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am proud today to introduce my private member's bill to eliminate the federal excise tax charged on fuel used in farming and in the fishing industry.

Farmers are in dire straits right now. If we can deliver a tax break on one of the largest farm inputs, it would help restore profits in the farming industry. Public policy has long dictated that tax should not be built into the cost of food to consumers, who enjoy high quality food products at affordable prices. Fishers in my riding of Selkirk—Interlake and across the country would benefit from the tax reduction on their inputs as well.

The bill would eliminate the 10¢ excise tax on gasoline and the 4¢ tax on diesel fuel used by fishermen and farmers. This would help lower the input cost to farmers who are currently selling many commodities at below the cost of production while absorbing years of losses caused by BSE, trade disputes, droughts, early frosts and flooding.

As the WTO tries to move toward greater liberalization of trade in agriculture, it is important that we develop policy that is viewed as WTO-green. This tax break would fit in perfectly. This initiative would allow farmers and fishermen to keep those dollars in their pockets.

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

* * *

● (1525)

CANADA HEALTH ACT

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-459, An Act to amend the Canada Health Act (Autism Spectrum Disorder).

He said: Mr. Speaker, one out of every 166 persons in the country has an autistic child. The purpose of this enactment is to ensure that the costs of applied behavioural analysis, ABA, or intensive behavioural intervention, IBI, for autistic persons is covered under the health care insurance plan of every province and territory.

It is a sin that children who have autism are not covered under our health care act. It is time for that to change. The bill would do exactly that.

I would encourage all members of Parliament to rapidly move this to third reading, pass it through the Senate and have it done by this evening.

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

* * *

[Translation]

INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-460, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (definition of "Gaspé Peninsula").

He said: Mr. Speaker, this bill seeks to eliminate the discrimination that currently exists in my riding, where half of the people in the riding, living in Montmagny—L'Islet RCM, are not eligible for a tax credit that applies to residents of Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup. I hope that the introduction of this bill today will provide some inspiration to the government for its next budget.

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

* * *

[English]

CANADA LABOUR CODE

Mr. Randy Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-461, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code (replacement workers).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to introduce this bill because the protracted Telus labour dispute revealed some flaws in the current Canada Labour Code provisions with respect to replacement workers.

The bill would require an employer to convince the CIRB that the use of replacement workers would not undermine the union and to receive written authorization to that effect before any replacement workers could be used.

The bill would improve the current situation where the employer puts replacement workers in place and then the union has to file a complaint and wait for an unacceptably long time for the CIRB to rule. In the meantime the damage is done. This would be an improvement.

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

* * *

INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-462, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (travel expenses).

He said: Mr. Speaker, how many times have we dreamed about travelling abroad? Instead of getting away to a foreign destination, why not spend time relaxing in Canada?

Routine Proceedings

[Translation]

Today, I am pleased to introduce an act to amend the Income Tax Act to provide a maximum deduction of \$1,000 from a taxpayer's income in respect of the expenses of purchasing tickets for the taxpayer or members of the taxpayer's family for travel by airplane, train or bus if the travel involves crossing at least three different provincial boundaries.

[English]

It seems that Canadians from British Columbia to Prince Edward Island can agree that we live in a beautiful country filled with natural and cosmopolitan wonders alike. However, why do so many Canadians think about travelling abroad instead of discovering their country first?

As chair of the finance committee, I had the opportunity to travel across Canada this fall during prebudget consultations. I wondered how many Canadians got to visit all corners of our vast country. The bill would promote national unity by allowing Canadians to learn more about their fellow citizens and could only have a positive effect on local economies with the additional money spent during these trips.

This private member's bill would be revenue neutral to the finance department.

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

* * *

● (1530)

EXCISE TAX ACT

Mr. Russ Hiebert (South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-463, An Act to amend the Excise Tax Act (rebate on goods and services tax on new homes).

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today to present a private member's bill respecting the GST rebate levied on new housing. The rebate is critical in reducing real estate market price distortions, particularly in my province of British Columbia where prices are reaching record highs.

The bill seeks to increase the bracket at which the GST rebate applies on new housing. The new bracket would account for price inflation, since the GST was first introduced, and would index the rebate to account for future price inflation as well.

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

* * *

GOVERNOR GENERAL APPOINTMENT AND DISMISSAL ACT

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-464, An Act to provide for the appointment and dismissal of a Governor General.

He said: Mr. Speaker, many Canadians, myself included, are delighted with the performance of Canada's new Governor General and wish her many years of success. We are not, however, equally delighted with the system by which governors general are appointed and may be dismissed, which is to say entirely at the discretion of the Prime Minister. This is the result of a holdover convention from the

19th century under which the Queen acts entirely on the advice of the prime minister in making these decisions.

This is most important not in regard to the appointment of a governor general but rather with regard to the dismissal of a governor general. It was on this basis in 1975 in Australia, a country in which I lived for some time, that the governor general dismissed the prime minister and the prime minister's first action was to attempt to cause the governor general to be dismissed by speaking directly to the Queen.

Had this occurred and had he been successful, the country would have been thrown into a constitutional crisis. The goal is to prevent this kind of thing from ever occurring in Canada in the future.

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

* * *

PERSONAL WATERCRAFT ACT

Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam, CPC) moved that Bill S-12, An Act concerning personal watercraft in navigable waters, be read the first time.

He said: Mr. Speaker, this is a bill that Senator Spivak has been working on in the other House. It is a bill that essentially speaks to Conservative principles, which is giving more power, money, control and authority to municipalities and cottage counties when it comes to regulating personal watercraft for noise and pollution purposes. It is something that we stand for, which is taking more power out of the hands of Ottawa and giving it back to the hands of municipalities and local governments.

(Motion agreed to and bill read the first time)

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

HEALTH

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I move that the eighth report of the Standing Committee on Health, presented on Monday, April 11, be concurred in.

For the information of the House, I only intend to make a couple of comments on this matter. It has to do with Bill C-206, health warning labels on the containers of alcoholic beverages. The bill passed by a 90% plurality in the House at second reading. It was referred to committee.

As a consequence of the proceedings, the members of the committee wanted to explore the opportunity with Health Canada to have a comprehensive strategy for addressing fetal alcohol syndrome. That was not forthcoming at the time. As a consequence, this report was issued, recommending that the House not further deal with Bill C-206. The members also passed a motion that Health Canada be asked to table a comprehensive strategy dealing with Bill C-206, fetal alcohol syndrome, and that was done in June.

Routine Proceedings

Therefore, it is my sincere wish that the House vote no on the concurrence motion that I have presented today so together we can move forward on a comprehensive public education campaign, including health warning labels on the containers of alcoholic beverages, to address fetal alcohol syndrome, the preventable tragedy.

• (1535)

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And more than five members having risen:

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

And the bells having rung:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): A recorded division on the motion stands deferred until tomorrow at the end of government orders.

* * *

PETITIONS**KIDNEY DISEASE**

Hon. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition from people in Peterborough who are concerned about kidney disease.

The petitioners know that real progress is being made in various ways of preventing and coping with kidney disease, in particular, the development of a bioartificial kidney.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to make research funding available to the Canadian Institutes of Health Research for the explicit purpose of conducting bioartificial kidney research as an extension of research being conducted in the United States.

I thank Ken Sharp of Peterborough for his fine work on these petitions.

• (1540)

AGE OF CONSENT

Hon. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by 148 members of St. Anne's Women's Group in Peterborough. They point out that Bill C-2 did not change the age of

consent. The age remains at 14 years, yet 14 to 17 year olds do not have the maturity to recognize exploitive relationships.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to protect children rather than adults by moving swiftly to change the age of consent.

HOUSING

Hon. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from more than 300 students at Trent University who come from all over Ontario.

The petitioners draw the attention of the House to the fact that as a result of the funding cuts of the 1990s, over 1.7 million Canadians are at risk of becoming homeless.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to double the commitment to housing programs by restoring and renewing housing spending.

AGRICULTURE

Hon. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have one more petition to present today from supplied managed farmers in my constituency.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to put all poultry, dairy and egg product tariff lines in the sensitive products category at the WTO negotiations.

[*Translation*]

TRANSPORT

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table a petition signed by over 500 residents in my riding. The petitioners are asking the Minister of Transport to maintain, at their current level, the essential flight security services provided by NAV CANADA at the Roberval airport.

CANADA POST CORPORATION

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am tabling a petition with 907 signatures to be added to the 130,000 names on the petitions already tabled by my colleagues from the region. The petitioners are opposing the closure of the postal sorting facility in Quebec City.

As we know, this sorting centre was closed without providing a downsizing plan. This is why the public is expressing its outrage about the closure of the sorting facility for the Quebec City region. The petition has now been signed by 131,000 people.

[*English*]

AGE OF CONSENT

Mrs. Betty Hinton (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to present a petition on behalf of hundreds of my constituents.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to protect our children by taking all necessary steps to raise the age of consent from 14 years to 18 years.

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present several petitions signed by people of Essex and other rural communities, such as farmers who drive their pick-up trucks, families who drive mini-vans, and people who drive vehicles, not bicycles, to commute to and from work.

The petitioners are seriously concerned about the government profiting from high gas taxes. They call on the House to immediately cap the amount of GST collected once the price of fuel reaches a certain level and eliminate the tax on tax where Ottawa charges GST on top of other fuel taxes.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am presenting two petitions to the House today. The first petition has over 380 signatures on it.

The petitioners call upon the government to enact legislation to eliminate the goods and services tax charged on the federal excise tax on fuel and all other provincial and federal taxes in fuel costs and ensure that the charge on the GST be limited to only 85¢ a litre.

The second petition is signed by over 520 farmers and fishermen.

The petitioners call upon the government to enact legislation to eliminate the federal excise tax on diesel fuel and gasoline used in farming operations and commercial fisheries.

Mr. Barry Devolin (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present a large number of petitions all regarding fuel tax. The fuel taxes are too high in Canada.

Some of these petitions are in certifiable form and some are not. I would like to present those that are in certifiable form today. I would like to ask for unanimous consent to table those petitions that are not in certifiable form.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): Does the hon. member have unanimous consent to table petitions that are not under the standard form?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

AUTISM

Mr. Don Bell (North Vancouver, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present two petitions from constituents in my riding of North Vancouver and surrounding communities.

They petition the government to amend the Canada Health Act and regulations to include IBI ABA therapy for children with autism as a medically necessary treatment. They also petition the government to require that all provinces provide or fund this essential treatment for autism. They also request the creation of academic chairs at a university in each province to teach IBI ABA treatment at the undergraduate and doctoral levels so that Canadian professionals will no longer be forced to leave the country to receive academic training in this field and so that every Canadian with autism can receive the best treatment available.

• (1545)

U.S. WESTERN HEMISPHERE TRAVEL INITIATIVE

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition with about 1,500 names on it from the Windsor Essex County area opposing the western hemisphere travel initiative and

Routine Proceedings

calling upon Parliament to insist that the United States stop the implementation of that initiative.

AUTOMOBILE RECYCLING

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present two petitions. One demands that the government set up at long last a recycling program for the automobiles that are manufactured in this country. As we head into talks around climate change this seems most apropos for us to finally have an auto strategy.

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is most impressive in its size and breadth. It calls upon the government to stop pillaging the employment insurance fund for other purposes and to actually have a fund that works for average working Canadians and their families.

AUTISM

Mr. Russ Powers (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House to present a petition on behalf of residents in my riding. They ask that autism be included in the Canada Health Act for therapy treatment and for the inclusion of chairs in the appropriate universities and colleges in all our provinces and territories to teach same.

[Translation]

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am presenting a petition today on the need to implement the refugee appeal division. This petition was given to us on November 23 of this year during a public protest on Parliament Hill. Participants in that protest were crying out to us to liberate Maoua Diomande.

Standing in solidarity with those suffering from this injustice, the members for Kitchener—Waterloo, Calgary West, Burnaby—Douglas and myself, representing Vaudreuil-Soulanges, have made the commitment to highlight the need for implementing the refugee appeal division to ensure the effectiveness of the Canadian refugee determination process.

In the interests of efficiency, a specialized appeal division is a much better use of scarce resources than recourse to the Federal Court, which is not at all specialized in refugee matters.

In the interests of consistency of law, an appeal division deciding on the merits of the case is the only body able to ensure better interpretation of jurisprudence.

In the interests of justice, as in matters of criminal law, the right to appeal to a higher tribunal is essential for the proper administration of justice.

*Government Orders***QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS**

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if Question No. 220 could be made an order for return, this return would be tabled immediately.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 220—**Hon. Ed Broadbent:**

With regard to the conduct of the government towards Talisman Energy Inc.: (a) what were the results of the 2002 study by the Foreign Affairs Minister on Talisman Energy Inc.; (b) what action was taken by the Department of Foreign Affairs at the time; (c) was the Department able to take legal action against Talisman Energy Inc.; (d) what laws were in place at the time to govern the conduct of Canadian corporations abroad with respect to human rights; (e) what laws are in place now to govern the conduct of Canadian corporations abroad with respect to human rights; (f) why did the Department of Foreign Affairs choose to send diplomatic notes to the U. S. Department of State in July 2004 and in 2005 rather than filing an amicus brief; (g) were contacts made with Talisman Energy Inc. regarding these diplomatic notes, and, if so, what contacts were made; (h) did the Department receive or solicit legal advice from Talisman Energy Inc.; and (i) does the government believe that corporations should be subject to international human rights laws and globally agreed upon environmental standards?

(Return tabled)

[Translation]

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

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

TRANSPORTATION AMENDMENT ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-44, An Act to amend the Canada Transportation Act and the Railway Safety Act, to enact the VIA Rail Canada Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak to Bill C-44, an act to amend the Canada Transportation Act and the Railway Safety Act, to enact the VIA Rail Canada Act and to make consequential amendments to other acts. I do not think the Liberals, if they tried, could make a title more convoluted or longer. The bill was tabled in the House on March 24, 2005, over six months ago, and the Minister of Transport has shown zero interest in moving it forward since it was tabled. More serious than that, it shows that the Minister of Transport has very poor listening skills.

The Library of Parliament did an extensive analysis of Bill C-44 and stated:

The bill is similar in most aspects to its predecessor bill, C-26, the Transportation Amendment Act, which was introduced in the House of Commons on 23 February 2003.

That is correct. Bill C-44, the new transportation amendment act, is extremely similar to Bill C-26, the old transportation amendment act, which was introduced by the transport minister's predecessor, David Collenette. The fact that Bill C-44 is so similar to Bill C-26 is troubling in a number of ways.

First, on November 12, 2003 the Liberals let the old transportation amendment act die on the order paper when it became apparent that committee witnesses were not in favour of it.

Second, after the mini throne speech of February 2, 2004, the Liberals made no attempt to resuscitate the old transportation amendment act. Presumably the Liberals had learned of the act's flaws and were taking their time to draft much improved legislation.

After the June 28, 2004 election, the member for Outremont was appointed the Minister of Transport in this minority government. In his maiden speech on October 7, 2004 he spoke of his 12 years on the opposition benches and how he had worked hard during that time to restore public faith in elected officials. There was every reason to believe that the new minister, working in a minority government, was interested in seeking consensus and making a difference.

Indeed, on October 15, 2004, when the Conservative member for Niagara Falls stood in the House to debate the transport minister's first bill, he congratulated the minister for introducing legislation that corrected past mistakes. He said:

—[this] bill corrects the mistakes that were made in the last few years by the Liberal government.

I wish all the mistakes that the government has made could be so easily corrected and with so few consequences.

Everyone can imagine our surprise when the new transportation amendment act was tabled embracing virtually all of the old flaws of the old transportation amendment act. Not only was the new transport minister recycling legislation that had been killed by the previous government, he was reintroducing a bill which had been made partially irrelevant by the passage of time.

By way of example, the old transportation amendment act contained provisions that permitted a non-Canadian company to offer domestic air service for "any period of time". At the time, Air Canada was about to file for protection from its creditors and there were no guarantees that its restructuring would be successful. Indeed, had Air Canada failed, permitting foreign carriers to offer some domestic capacity at least on a temporary basis might have been desirable.

However, the same text exists in the new bill in clause 19. Not only has Air Canada exited from its creditor protection, but WestJet has expanded coast to coast and has started Toronto-Charlottetown non-stop service. The scenario under which a foreign carrier might conceivably be permitted to serve the Canadian domestic market no longer exists. Worse, this clause is present in legislation tabled by the very same Minister of Transport who, in one of his first appearances before the transportation committee, called on members to explore air liberalization.

Government Orders

In fact, at the meeting he handed out a document improbably titled, "Air Liberalization: a Review of Canada's Economic Regulatory Regime as it Affects the Canadian Air Industry". The transport committee took the minister seriously and conducted hearings into air liberalization, I should mention also at the cost of hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars. Given his call for the committee to review Canada's economic and regulatory regime as it affects the Canadian air industry, the committee made recommendations on ways to improve the same regulatory regime for the benefit of the Canadian air industry and Canadian taxpayers.

The recommendations were unanimous and were the result of considerable industry input. The committee called on the government to reduce airport rents by at least 75% and reinvest the money received into airport infrastructure. Other recommendations included the elimination of the air transport security charge and cancelling the obligation of airport authorities to provide free rent to federal agencies.

Finally, there were calls on the federal government to pay for border clearance at airports with regular transborder and/or international services and to fund the cost of implementing federal regulations at small regional airports. The committee's report was tabled on May 19, 2005 and the Minister of Transport replied on September 21. In his response the minister rejected all of the committee's recommendations and justified airport rents as "the result of satisfying the government's real property policy, which is to receive a fair return on public assets that are being leased to private companies or commercialized entities".

● (1550)

Yet Toronto's Lester B. Pearson International Airport, which handles 33% of Canada's commercial air traffic, will now pay 63% of Ottawa's total revenue from airport rent or airport taxes. Ottawa's greed for airport rent has made Toronto the most expensive place in the world to land an airplane.

Stanley Morais, general manager of El Al's Canadian operation, is on record as saying it costs the airline \$12,000 to land a jumbo jet at Pearson international airport in Toronto, compared with \$3,000 at Tel Aviv.

When we think of the cost of security at Tel Aviv, the fact that landing fees would be four times higher at Pearson is simply staggering. It is worse when we realize that much of the rent that the Toronto airport pays to Ottawa is for buildings that no longer exist, such as the outdated and recently demolished Terminal 1.

In fact, the blatant unfairness of Toronto's airport rent situation is underscored by the number of unlikely allies that have united their voices in a call to the Minister of Transport and the Liberal government to act. They include: the International Air Transport Association, the Air Transport Association of Canada, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Transport, including all political parties, the Province of Ontario, the Liberal premier of Ontario, the Association of Airline Representatives in Canada, the Toronto Board of Trade, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, the Greater Toronto Hotel Association, and the Canadian Tourism Association.

Let us not overlook the fact that Toronto's Pearson airport is Air Canada's hub, so it can be argued that extremely high airport taxes at

Pearson airport affect the bottom line of the airline that just recently emerged from creditor protection.

Let me repeat that. The Minister of Transport says he is worried about Air Canada's financial health. Air Canada's hub is in Toronto. The fact that airport fees there were the second highest in the world and are now, because of recent changes, the highest in the world is because the Minister of Transport and the Liberal government are taxing that airport into the ground.

Nonetheless, because the minister is concerned about the potential failure of a Canadian carrier, the new Transportation Amendment Act that we are debating today contains the same clauses as the old bill, permitting him to allow a foreign carrier to offer domestic service in Canada under certain conditions.

This would be a huge step backwards. Not only does it ignore the tremendous management-union collaboration in restructuring Air Canada, but it ignores the fact that the problems in Canada's domestic airline industry are not solved by letting foreign carriers fly domestic routes. They are solved by lowering the government charges and fees that hamper the industry. Lowering government charges and fees is consistent with the unanimous recommendations of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Transport, with the suggestions of all experts and with the advice given by virtually every witness, both foreign and Canadian, who has studied the matter.

Moreover, there is a very basic logical flaw in the proposal to let foreign carriers fly domestic routes under certain conditions. The proposal is based on the idea that where a domestic carrier has failed, a foreign carrier might fill the void, at least temporarily. However, this is by no means certain. In fact, on September 20 at the Airports Council International meeting in Toronto, JetBlue founder and president David Neeleman was asked if his low cost airline would consider serving Canada. "No," he replied, "the bureaucracy and fees would kill us".

Finally, the idea is 100% opposed to the spirit of what the Minister of Transport said when he appeared before the transport committee on February 21, 2005. He said:

Our objectives are to encourage the creation of new markets and services, to lower costs and increase competition in the interest of Canadians, while at the same time ensuring that the air transport industry remains strong and vital. We can do this by eliminating legislative and regulatory barriers and by changing the economic policies that unduly restrict air transport services.

Since that date, the minister appears to have ignored his own advice and the advice of the transport committee. Granting foreign carriers domestic rights in Canada without first demanding reciprocity would set a dangerous precedent and weaken our bargaining position when it comes time to expand the scope of the Canada-U.S. open skies agreement. This would truly undermine our ability to engage in the open skies negotiations that he says he favours.

Government Orders

I do not want to dwell only on clause 19 of the bill. I hold it up only as an example of how a clause that might have made sense two years ago is difficult, if not impossible, to justify today. Quite frankly, a transport minister who would reintroduce stale, two year old legislation from the last Parliament without updating it is not doing his job.

Canada's economy depends on transport and few industries are more fluid than the airline sector. The situation today is dramatically different from what existed two years ago. The fact that the past legislation was not updated and that the transport committee's recommendations were ignored raises serious questions about the transport minister and his job performance.

• (1555)

In fact, he should have a serious and very frank discussion with Louis Ranger, his deputy minister. Mr. Ranger is very aware of the flaws in the old Bill C-26. The fact that he would have allowed the Minister of Transport to re-table the same flawed bill under a new number makes me question the kind of advice that he is giving the minister in this minority government.

For example, on Tuesday, October 28, 2003, during the transport committee's hearings into the old Bill C-26, Mr. Sean Finn, senior vice-president and legal officer for Canadian National Railway, said:

Regarding clause 40, which deals with the competitive connection rate, this new regulatory provision could bring about re-regulation of the rail industry and, in the longer term, Canadian railways could be treated unfairly. It would provide our U.S. competitors with unfair advantages, which could affect the density of traffic required to sustain the Canadian network, thereby impacting all [Canadian] shippers.

Fundamentally, this provision would allow American railways doing business in Canada to benefit from a regulatory environment that could result in an unfair treatment for Canadian railways.

Essentially, if a shipper can request that we require Canadian railways to offer a rate that would allow him to ship his products all the way to [an] American railway doing business in Canada, we recommend that this provision be applicable only if the American railway is also required to provide the same advantages to CN or CP when they are doing business in the United States. So we are essentially demanding that we ensure a level playing field, in terms of operations and competition, by submitting American railways doing business in Canada to the same requirements that apply to Canadian railways that want to ship Canadian system goods that come from the United States.

Mr. Serge Cantin, general counsel for Canadian National Railway, added that, under the previous system, the competitive connection rate, previously known as the competitive line rate, or CLR, had never been used by a Canadian shipper but only by a U.S. railroad, Burlington Northern, which used it to carry traffic over CP's track and then route it into Burlington Northern's U.S. network.

Given the testimony of how the competitive connection rate would potentially hurt Canadian railways without giving Canadian shippers lower rates, it would have been fair to expect the transport minister to redraft the clause. To my knowledge, the only change that has been made to the former clause 40 is that it is now renumbered as clause 42, but the text and effect are identical.

There are other examples where the new transportation amendment act is actually worse than the old transportation amendment act, despite expert testimony drawing the government's attention to the flaws in the old act. Here we find situations where the government listened to the witnesses at committee and then did precisely the opposite of what was recommended.

For instance, clause 16 of the old bill proposed to regulate the advertising of airline ticket prices. Its stated objective was to combat the sticker shock that happens when a customer sees a low fare advertised but has to pay considerably more when taxes and fees are included. A typical example would be an Ottawa-Vancouver discount fare that is advertised at \$398 but costs \$534.30 when taxes, fees and charges are included.

To address this situation, clause 16 of the old transportation amendment act would have required any advertisement for an airline ticket that shows the price of the ticket to also show the final price. In our discussion of the old transportation amendment act, we pointed out that the Air Transport Association of Canada had voluntarily agreed to do this before Christmas 2002 and that the sticking point was not the Canadian airline industry but the need to get both Canadian and U.S. carriers to adopt similar advertising strategies for tickets on transborder routes.

As I have observed earlier, roughly two years have passed between the introduction of the old act and the introduction of this new transportation amendment act. In fact, the Air Transport Association of Canada had voluntarily agreed to full price disclosure months before the old act was introduced and ever saw the light of day. Nonetheless, when the new Minister of Transport tabled his new act, he went even further than his predecessor to require a behaviour that the airline industry had already adopted.

Clause 30 of the new bill lets the minister:

—make regulations respecting advertising in all media, including on the Internet, of prices for air services within, or originating in, Canada...requiring a carrier who advertises a price for an area of service to

(a) include in the price all costs to the carrier of providing the service, and

(b) indicate in the advertisement all fees, charges and taxes collected by the carrier...

Not only does the minister want to force airlines to do something they are already doing, but he is trying to regulate the Internet.

Yet in his testimony on May 5, 2003, during the transport committee hearings into the old transportation amendment act, Mr. Warren Everson, who was then the vice-president of policy at the Air Transport Association of Canada, questioned the wisdom of regulating airline advertising. He said:

• (1600)

If four operators or, say, the United States carriers don't have to abide by this or flout the law, they will be posting prices that are 20% [to] 40% cheaper than those posted in the advertisements in Canada. And if a small carrier in Canada, such as a small charter operation, tells a large tour operator in the United States or a cruise line that this is how they have to do it, that this is how the advertising has to be, it leaves no leverage whatsoever. If he insists on it and they don't care to comply, he'll simply lose the contract. We just don't understand how it's possible for the federal government to assign someone to enforce federal law outside their jurisdiction.

Our conclusion, which will come as no surprise, is that we find this proposed section to be very poorly designed. We find it deceptive as to its intent and likely to cause significant difficulties for the airlines, and we ask the committee to strike it from the bill.

Government Orders

He could not have been more clear. He showed the inherent unfairness of the idea, identified difficulties of enforcement and recommended that the idea be rejected.

While it is true that the text has been rewritten substantially in the new transportation amendment act, the intent remains the same and the obvious difficulties of trying to enforce federal regulations on the Internet or in other countries remain true.

The Liberals want the advertised price to include all of those taxes, charges and fees, but we disagree. When we buy a stereo the price does not include the GST and PST and thus the consumer receives the sticker shock when he or she goes to pay. The Liberals opposite used this example to win the 1993 election with a promise to “kill, scrap, abolish” the GST. They recognized the potential electoral age that sticker shock could provoke.

On this side of the House, we want Canadians to be much better informed about the government's insatiable appetite for taxes. If paying \$136.30 in taxes and fees on a \$398 airline ticket encourages consumer outrage against a greedy government with a massive \$10 billion surplus, we are all for it. In fact, if gas stations advertised gasoline at 75.3¢ a litre and then told motorists that the real price was \$1.10 when they paid at the pump, because of taxes, we would see the kind of public outcry that usually marks the impending downfall of a scandal-plagued government.

There are, of course, a few areas where the new transportation amendment act slightly improves the old act. Clause 27 of the former bill required the Minister of Transport to designate the Air Travel Complaints Commissioner to hold office for not more than two consecutive one year terms. Clause 28 of the bill deletes the position. Transport Canada explains the change in policy as follows:

[The] position of the Air Travel Complaints Commissioner was established as a temporary measure in 2000, following the acquisition by Air Canada of Canadian Airlines, to address potential consumer abuses regarding the quality of service during the transition period. Since then, the market has changed substantially. Air Canada is no longer the single dominant carrier and no longer the main target of complaints, reflecting the fact that there is competition on most major routes in Canada.

Clause 28 of the new bill is perhaps the only concrete example of where the minister has witnessed the evolution of the transport sector over the past two years and updated his legislation to reflect that evolution. Had he truly updated the bill in light of the progress of the last two years and the testimony of witnesses during the committee hearings into the old bill, he could have given the transport committee a bill worthy of serious and full consideration.

Finally, I must turn my attention to part 3 of Bill C-44. In clause 74, the Liberal government proposes to take the private corporation known as VIA Rail Inc. and make it into a crown corporation. The clause is identical to clause 67 of the old Bill C-26. Curiously, when the transport minister's office contacted us before the tabling of Bill C-44, we informed it that in the interest of having a proper discussion of the bill's merits, the clause dealing with VIA Rail should not be included but rather should be introduced later as a separate bill.

That has not been done and I am aware of members of various parties who are calling for it. The fact that the minister, in a minority government, would ignore such a basic request from people from all parties, knowing that members of his own caucus support this

position, clearly puzzles me and the House. In any event, my party is 100% opposed to part 3 of Bill C-44 and on this ground alone we will be opposing Bill C-44.

When the Liberal government appointed the Canadian transportation act review panel and it tabled its report, “Vision and Balance” in June 2001, it made two recommendations about VIA Rail.

In recommendation 11.5, the panel recommended “a full cost recovery policy for Quebec City-Windsor corridor rail and its commercialization. As a first step, corridor operations as a whole should be separated organizationally from VIA Rail's other services” and management should be changed. Recommendation 11.6 made a second recommendation regarding VIA Rail and corridor services for commercial purposes having “the freedom required to become and remain self-sufficient”.

Part 3 of Bill C-44 ignores those recommendations, just as the minister has ignored the witnesses and the transport committee itself. Because he has ignored all of this and the information that has been prepared for him and for his department on Bill C-44, I urge members of the transport committee to ignore the bill if and when the House shows the judgment of sending it to them.

● (1605)

The bill should be divided and put into its proper context. There should be more thoughtful and thorough debate and the transport minister should do his homework before putting an omnibus bill before a Parliament that is about to die and show a little bit more respect for the transportation industry.

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Niagara Falls, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague, the transport critic for the Conservative Party, for a very thorough analysis of the bill. I was the transportation critic myself for the Conservative Party after the election in 2004. Because of his expertise and experience in this area, he was very helpful to me in that new role.

One of the things he and I discussed right at the outset of the transportation area was our party's belief that investment in transportation infrastructure helped the economy. There is a tremendous payback to the economy when we have a transportation system that works and works well, which is one of the reasons why I am very disappointed with the bill before us today.

My colleague would agree with me that much more needs to be done to facilitate the flow of goods and services on the west coast. My area of Niagara is an example of an area with a number of border crossings. We have been urging the government to pay attention and settle some of the issues that involve our borders.

Is he as dissatisfied as I am that many of these questions have not been addressed and that we have this last minute bill before the House of Commons?

Government Orders

I want to commend the hon. member as well because he has raised again in the House, as many of us have, the unconscionable rates that apply at Pearson Airport. There is no reason whatsoever why Pearson Airport should be the most expensive airport in the world. The government has allowed that to happen. I am pleased my colleague has pointed out that we disagree with it.

I had the opportunity last night to go through Pearson Airport. As my colleague enumerated, there is a small billboard that lists all the people who are quite concerned about the high cost of Pearson Airport. I believe it also includes the municipal government, as well as the other groups and agencies, and the provincial government, which my colleague mentioned. When it gets to the bottom of the billboard where it says “the federal government”, that box is left not ticked. Why? Because the federal government is mainly responsible for these unconscionable costs.

Going back to the discussions I had with my colleague, when we make transportation infrastructure, like Pearson Airport, exorbitantly expensive, it hurts everybody. The Minister of Transport and his Liberal colleagues, by making Pearson Airport the most expensive airport in the world not only hurts Toronto and Pearson Airport, but it has a profound effect on the travelling public and the economy of southern Ontario as well as the rest of Canada. Could he comment on that, please?

• (1610)

Mr. James Moore: Mr. Speaker, after the 2004 campaign, he was given the task of being transport critic and he did it so well that after three months he was promoted to be the whip of the Conservative Party. He has done such a phenomenal job on behalf of our party.

I agree with him on all counts. The transportation policy of the Liberal government for the past 12 years has been a myth. It is non-existent.

Canada is one of the few countries in the world that I know of where transportation infrastructure is built into the very creation of our nation, a bridge to P.E.I., a railway from coast to coast, ferry service to Newfoundland and Labrador. Transportation is part of the heart and soul of what created our country. Yet when we look over the past decade of the Liberal government, not one Canadian can name a single substantive achievement by it in the area of transportation.

The simple difference between the Liberals and Conservatives, when it comes to transportation, is Conservatives believe that transportation is a mechanism for nation-building. Liberals look at the transportation industry as a way of raising taxes and revenue for the state.

We can look at every area of the transportation industry, such as the air industry, which we are debating now. When 9/11 happened, the Liberals instituted a new security regime and they put in place a \$24 a head air security tax. Increasing rents and landing fees at Pearson Airport are consequences of that. They are increasing taxes across the board in the air industry. They are increasing airport improvement fees for people when they fly because they have not dealt with the governance issue at airport authorities across the country.

We can look at roads in the country. In the fiscal year 2003, the last numbers for which I have the data, of the 100% of gas tax revenues that the government collected, it invested 2.4% into roads. It is taxing people at the pumps and not putting money into the roads. It is taxing truck drivers and taxi drivers and not putting those investments back where they need to be.

On the rail side, we see exactly the same kind of thing with a lack of competition and access for producers in the prairie provinces.

We can go across all sectors and the Liberals look at transportation as a way to raise money. What we want to do is take a step back and build a true national infrastructure, with air competition and more open skies so people have more choice and options when they fly, with lower fees and reduced rates. We want to have a first class Trans-Canada Highway from coast to coast that is the pride of this nation. We want to protect ferry services to Newfoundland and Labrador so people get the service that they have been promised and that has been justified. We want to fix the dangerous parts of highway in the country that are costing people their lives needlessly because the government would rather have that money for general revenue than investing it into projects that need proper service.

On the rail industry, we will ensure competition. We will ensure that we have better access to commuter rail by exposing and making transparent the contracts between rail companies and municipal authorities so there is clear transparency and accountability. We will have, as a government, a comprehensive, national transportation plan that covers all sectors and that will get this country moving again.

For a decade the Liberals have done nothing. When 9/11 happened, the government completely arrested and nothing moved forward; no focus, no agenda, no specific plan for transportation infrastructure. From highways to air policy to the shipping industry to the Pacific gateway, to ferry service, all of it, a Conservative government will move forward and we will get this country moving again.

• (1615)

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to express my appreciation to my colleague for his well thought out speech and the positions that he takes. Transportation is a difficult portfolio to handle because it is as wide and varied as is agriculture, for example. However, when transportation and agriculture are combined, sometimes the results are fairly interesting.

I want to talk a little about the project underway in western Canada right now. The government has made a decision that it will sell its 12,000 hopper rail cars. Over the years, there has been a push by farmers to get control of these cars. The taxpayers already have paid for them once, but farmers want to get control of them.

Early on in the project, which is almost 10 years ago now, there was a discussion about the fact that there would be lower freight rates for farmers and that farmers would be able to save money through this project. It has been interesting, as the project has developed, it seems the idea that farmers are going to save money has disappeared from the formula. Now when Farmer Rail Coalition is talking about the rail cars, there is no longer the statement being made that farmers are going to save a lot of money, and that is of concern to some of us.

Government Orders

As the commitment to saving farmers money has disappeared, what has reappeared is Liberal connections within the project. Last week the government announced that it was moving ahead with this project and it was going to be turning it over to a group in western Canada. It seemed that the government was doing this as another election promise. We saw \$23 billion in 23 days, and this was part of that billion dollar a day spending program.

It is interesting that the finance minister's campaign co-chair for Saskatchewan has been involved in the project from the beginning. Last Friday we rose in the House during question period and asked the finance minister if he could tell us how much his campaign manager had received from the project. He could not do that or he refused to do that.

Does the member find that this political interference and appearance of rewarding people politically is found in other segments of the transportation segments in Canada?

Mr. James Moore: Mr. Speaker, the allegations are there. Specifically with the hopper car issue, to be clear for all Canadians and all producers across the country, a Conservative government would ensure that there is an open, fair, transparent process and that the sale of the hopper cars would be in the best interest of taxpayers and producers. We will not give special deals to our friends who happen to be our campaign co-chairs in the province of Saskatchewan like the Liberals have. We will not give a special deal to people, who because they are members of the Laurier Club for having donated tens of thousands of dollars to the Liberal Party will get a special deal.

While the transport minister has ignored the transport committee, we will put producers and taxpayers first if we sell those cars.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join in the debate today, especially when we look at some of the excitement and enthusiasm around the Hill today. I do not know if that has been directed at the anticipation of my colleague and the opposition critic's intervention on this legislation or more so for maybe something that will take place a little later on in the day.

The legislation before us is something that has been around in a previous Parliament. It is fairly similar to that one in a previous Parliament. The legislation has been refined. Consultations have been held with the various stakeholders and we believe it is stronger legislation.

The bill is an act to amend the Canada Transportation Act, the Railway Safety Act, to enact the VIA Rail Canada Act and to make consequential amendments to other acts. I believe it strikes some balance between the various transportation sector interests. When we talk about mergers and various aspects of the transportation industry, I believe it goes a long way to address many concerns from that sector.

In this era of rapid economic change, technological revolution and globalization, mergers and acquisitions can be considered a legitimate and necessary business strategy. Mergers allow corporations to gain efficiencies from economies of scale. Increased efficiency means more competitive businesses which in turn means a more vibrant economy.

Larger corporations can also mean a concentration of power and possibly reduced competition, but that is why we have merger provisions in the Competition Act. These provisions can stop a merger or restructure a merger to ensure there is no lessening of competition. However, there may be other reasons to stop a restructure merger, as we have seen in the case of banks and airlines.

The government believes mergers can be a viable business strategy, but each merger proposal must be assessed on its own merits. The Canada Transportation Act contains a merger review process for air carriers that came into force in July 2000. This process was established in response to Air Canada's acquisition of Canadian Airlines as part of a series of measures to foster competition in the airline industry while the industry experienced a radical restructuring. The government took these measures to ensure that consumers were protected from anti-competitive behaviour that could arise from a dominant carrier situation. The government now recognizes that we also need a merger review process for other major transportation services.

In 1999 the Canadian National Railway and the Burlington Northern Sante Fe Railway proposed to combine their businesses. CN and BNSF are two of the largest railways on the continent. In the United States, a moratorium was put on all railway mergers following the receipt of the merger proposal as it was felt that if the merger were permitted under current rules, more mergers would follow until only one or two transcontinental railways were left. After a year long review of the relevance of the existing merger rules, the U.S. released new rules that set higher standards for the approval of any large railway mergers.

At that time we heard from many interested parties in Canada that wanted to express their concerns regarding the proposed business combination. Under the applicable process at the time, these Canadian interests had to go to the U.S. authorities to get information and express their concerns as there was no public process available to them in Canada.

● (1620)

It is clear that Canadians should have access to a Canadian process to review significant transactions and these transactions should include any component of the transportation sector, not just air carriers. This process should apply to the review of both domestic and transnational mergers.

The Canada Transportation Act review panel heard from stakeholders all across the country and noted that the scope of the review process under the Competition Act is limited to competition issues and provides no opportunity to consider broad, national or public interest issues.

The panel noted the growing pressure toward integration in the North American rail industry and as a result its recommendations included a proposal that a transportation specific review process be established to review the national and public interest issues that may arise from merger proposals.

Government Orders

Given the clear need for a process for other transportation services, Bill C-44 would ensure that a merger review process similar to the one applicable to air carriers is available for all transportation undertakings under federal jurisdiction. The bill would introduce a formal and transparent transportation merger review process that builds on the existing processes and experience gained from the airline merger review process.

The government proposes that competition issues continue to be addressed by the Commissioner of Competition. The Minister of Transport will have the power to appoint a person or the Canadian Transportation Agency to review public interest issues that may arise from the proposed merger transaction. These issues can range from the integrity of the transportation network to service to small communities.

As we all know, the pace of business can be very rapid. Lengthy reviews can mean lost opportunities. The bill sets a predictable timeframe and process that should not unduly harm the normal course of business. The Minister of Transport must decide within 42 days whether there are public interest issues that may need to be addressed. Should a review process be initiated, it must be completed within 150 days.

However, we recognize there are always exceptions. While the government is proposing that reviews be completed within 150 days, the Minister of Transport will be given discretion to extend this timeframe if needed. We also know that businesses need to have a predictable framework. The government will provide for the minister to issue guidelines on the merger review process including setting out general public interest issues that would need to be addressed by the parties to the proposed merger.

This would allow the parties to consider these issues and determine whether a merger could continue to be pursued. Should the parties decide to continue, the merger proposal would include an assessment by the parties of the public interest issues and possible remedies.

A strong, efficient and vibrant transportation sector is vital to Canada's economic success. The transportation industry is not only important to the everyday lives of Canadians, it is an important contributor to the economic growth in job creation of this country. Because of the importance of this sector to the economy and society, the policy framework must support its potential for growth and provide the flexibility for the sector to adapt to increasing pressures from globalization.

However, the transportation sector is characterized by a small number of dominant carriers in the air and rail modes. In North America, mergers and acquisitions have been normal business practices in these modes to consolidate operations, reduce surplus capacity, and to improve cost efficiency and profitability.

The review provisions in the bill will help to ensure that we continue to have a healthy transportation sector operating in a competitive global environment, yet responsive to the needs of Canadian shippers and Canadian travellers.

• (1625)

Hon. Charles Hubbard (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank

the hon. member for his comments on Bill C-44. He comes from that great island of Cape Breton which is part of Nova Scotia. Being an island area, we have a ferry service going from Cape Breton to Newfoundland. We realize the importance of having a good transportation system.

The hon. member has done a lot of work to ensure we have good connections between our provinces and also the great province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Maybe he would like to comment in the House just what he has done and how important it is to Canada, and especially to the people of Atlantic Canada.

• (1630)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member indicated, the link between Cape Breton and Newfoundland is essential. There has been much in the news in recent months with regard to the ferry service.

We recognize, not just as Cape Bretoners but as maritimers and Canadians, that the link is essential. It is a continuation of the Trans-Canada Highway and is certainly a provision under the terms of Confederation for the province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I see a commitment by the government to ensure that this service is not only continued but enhanced. Deliberations have taken place over the last number of months and a study has been put forward. We recognize that this service could be further enhanced.

We look at such things as the drop trailer service that is utilized by so many of the truckers and those who bring goods on and off the island, which certainly is essential to the people of that area. We feel that if investment is made, we can improve and enhance that service.

Investments must be made and there is a commitment on the part of the government. Some of the recommendations that came out of the recent study looked at additional investment in terminal service, in docking service and wharfage. Those are all key to providing the top level of service that can be had, so that ferries can run on time, efficiently, and in a manner that is cost effective to all involved.

I will certainly continue to work on this file. My colleague, the member for Sydney—Victoria, has put a lot of work in on this file. My caucus colleagues from Newfoundland and Labrador will continue to support this initiative. We know it is important that Marine Atlantic is healthy, efficient, effective, and provides the service that is much needed between Cape Breton and Newfoundland and Labrador.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Lapierre (Lévis—Bellechasse, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this is a bill which I feel I have to be more vigilant about, because it concerns me. I am the member of Parliament for a riding where rail transport issues are very important, and my constituents are really anxious for certain irritants to be resolved.

Government Orders

When I read Bill C-44, I can see that the government is trying to substantially improve the legislation. We must recognize that there is a lot of room for improvement at present. If passed, this bill will amend the Canada Transportation Act and the Railway Safety Act. It will also enact the VIA Rail Canada Act and make amendments to other acts directly affected by the new provisions we are about to vote on to ensure that the efforts put into this will not be thwarted by any contradictions.

In principle, the Bloc Québécois is in favour of Bill C-44. Without overlooking the legislation as a whole, my remarks will focus mainly on rail transport because, as I indicated, this is an issue that is very important to the riding of Lévis—Bellechasse.

There are three major rail transport issues in my riding, including the riding's largest city, Lévis. Needless to say that the infamous engine whistle is extremely disruptive, especially in the middle of the night. In the daytime, it is bearable, but at night, it often lasts longer than necessary and is even less desirable.

In my humble opinion, the legislation should encourage railway companies to leave the 19th and 20th century behind and resolutely move into the 21st century. There are now alternatives to whistling to announce an incoming train and make railway crossings safe. What once was necessary no longer is, especially since the population in urban centres has grown tremendously and railway traffic has increased outrageously in frequency.

In this era where stress is becoming the norm, the impact of sleep disruption, among other problems, should not be underestimated. This is also the era of job performance. How can we balance one against the other?

The second problem in my region, as in many other regions in Quebec and in Canada, is the yard. It is a pain, a real headache for the urban planners and the citizens of a city built around or near the station, as is often the case in North America.

Fortunately, the new act will give the Canadian Transportation Agency the power to examine complaints about noise. The agency could, for example, require the railways to take measures to reduce as much as possible the harmful effects of noise during the construction of a railway or, what interests me even more, during its operation.

By taking the operational and service needs of the railway companies and the interests of the affected communities into account, we are definitely going in the right direction to find a solution to the disputes related to the operation of a yard.

I am therefore pleased to see that clause 32 of the bill gives the Canadian Transportation Agency the power to examine complaints about noise and to require the railways to take measures to reduce as much as possible the harmful effects of noise. And God knows how much noise there is. I am especially happy that the criterion of minimal damage caused by the operation of a railway, the old section 95, is found in Bill C-44, giving the agency a real power that it did not have, contrary to what many believed.

• (1635)

Clause 32 confers upon the Transportation Agency the jurisdiction to settle disputes. Thus, the need to allow rail companies to do

business and the right of people living along rail routes to peaceful enjoyment will be placed on equivalent levels. The agency will be able to require rail companies to take steps to limit the noise related to their activities. Financial imperatives will be taken into consideration, but will no longer necessarily take precedence.

Orders by the agency will be enforceable in the same manner as an order from a superior court, so people will need to proceed with caution. Non-compliance will lead to charges of contempt of court and the possibility of a prison sentence.

I myself feel that the provision on excessive noise ought perhaps to have been more extensive. It does not, for instance, allow restriction of other nuisances, although that would not be very complicated to do now. Like my Bloc colleagues, I feel that the Transportation Agency has the necessary legislative framework to be given jurisdiction over other types of nuisances such as vibrations. This would, among other things, be useful as far as oil and gas emissions are concerned, which are not covered by this proposed legislation.

It does not take a lot of imagination to understand how disagreeable those two substances can be when there is an unfortunate spill. We find our hands tied, because there are no provisions for helping people who are victims of such spills, nor to oblige prompt action by those responsible and, and more importantly, preventive measures.

This bill does not really have any teeth in it as far as operators are concerned in numerous negative situations.

This leads me to the third problem in my riding, which will clarify my previous criticism, I hope.

In order to facilitate the shipping of liquid cargoes to Montreal, a kind of semi-circular route had to be set up. One section travelled runs right through a marshy area, which makes daily operations even more vulnerable. There have been three derailments in recent years, and harmful substances have been spilled. Hon. members can well imagine the results. Will the agency have the power to force operators of a rail line to ensure that anyone using the rail service can do so without the risk of constant derailments and the hazards and inconveniences they entail?

There is more to environmental protection than air quality. Soil pollution, in this case, or in similar cases, is dramatic because there is always a risk of groundwater contamination. And this is only one problem that must imperatively be prevented in the future.

This is not the only inconvenience that we have with the bypass. The train has to go further and make a loop in order to come back in the other direction. This involves grade crossings and, thus, mandatory stops when the train uses this route.

Government Orders

In one area, vehicles may have to stop twice to let the same train pass. Worse than that, they may be stuck in the loop for many minutes, depending on the length of the train.

• (1640)

What do we do in an emergency? What do we do for ambulances carrying a very ill patient that remain stuck inside the loop? What do we do for firefighters responding to a fire alarm? What do we do for the police? We have to wait for the train to pass. This is a problem that I would have like to see resolved through this bill, to ensure that this never happens again. It seems to me that people's safety should be a priority.

To add to my previous statements, I hoped that the bill would be more binding on VIA Rail and give it a better legislative framework. This is a Canada-wide public utility and, consequently, it should be under more scrutiny, while maintaining some autonomy.

Upon its creation in 1997, VIA Rail was incorporated under the Canada Business Corporations Act. Today, clause 74 of Bill C-44 enacts the VIA Rail Canada Act. The constating documents of the Crown corporation are changed and its mandate is defined. This mandate is to manage and provide a safe and efficient passenger rail service in Canada. At least, this is what clause 8 of the proposed act says. As a whole, the rights and obligations of VIA Rail are maintained, but, under clause 7, the Minister of Transport is the appropriate minister in relation to the corporation.

The head office continues to be in Montreal. I am concerned about the fact that the governor in council can change that simply by order. This does not seem very democratic or very respectful to me. Let us hope that this situation never comes up.

On another matter, the fact that VIA Rail is not subject to the Access to Information Act is not the best idea. Although some commercial regulations may need protection, that is not a compelling enough argument to exclude this company from accountability in all other areas having to do with information.

At least the new VIA Rail legislation, because of its flexibility, will provide greater autonomy to make more appropriate decisions, which should make the administrators' task easier as it gives them a better framework. We made a wise decision in maintaining VIA Rail's rights and obligations; instead of a break with the past, we are ensuring continuity.

For these reasons that I have just outlined to my colleagues in the House, I will support the principle of separate legislation for VIA Rail.

Air transportation is not my chosen field, but I will give my opinion on it nonetheless. I am glad that marketing is heading toward being more truthful and accurate. Airlines will have to change their advertising methods and that will be for the best, I am sure. By requiring these companies to list the full fare including all related fees from now on, air travellers will be better able to assess the real cost, which can only be beneficial to everyone involved, including the carriers.

In the event of a problem, the transportation agency can require a carrier to take the necessary measures to compensate those affected

when sales or transportation conditions are not respected. This a step forward since the commissioner could only make suggestions before.

Unfortunately, the transportation agency, which gained more authority when the complaints commissioner position was cut, will no longer be required to submit an annual report on the complaints or how they were resolved. On the downside, life will be easier for those in the wrong because it will become more difficult to address their lapses. Let us hope to find a corrective measure for this.

The commissioner had the authority to require a lot of information from the carriers when complaints were lodged against them. The transportation agency does not have as much latitude.

• (1645)

So, I wonder whether it is a good thing that the public no longer has access to a commissioner.

Perhaps we could have transferred all the powers of the commissioner to the Canadian Transportation Agency. We will see where this will take us.

Once again, the interests of transparency, to which we refer so readily, are still not protected in the proposed legislation. This is why I deplore this weakening of the role of the Canadian Transportation Agency in terms of its power to investigate and its visibility.

I want to talk about one last negative aspect of the bill. The regulations on international bridges and tunnels are almost dangerous. The government is being given quasi police powers that are simply unacceptable. There is no other way to qualify a power to investigate without a warrant. And what about such an authoritarian power of seizure?

As regards the protection of the environment, the bill proposes to review the transportation policy so as to bring it closer to the objectives of the Kyoto protocol. Indeed, by contributing to the promotion of railway transportation, we aim to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, which is something that all taxpayers will appreciate. If, in addition to that, we manage to reduce noise pollution, we will have made very significant progress.

I want to stress another positive aspect. I am referring to the provision which provides that, if a company wants to dispose of a railway line, it must first offer it to those in charge of transportation services in the cities concerned, particularly municipalities.

These changes would allow public transit companies to receive such offers. Some urban sectors that provide services to several municipalities would undoubtedly be very pleased at such opportunities. They would be able to get these corridors and use them for public transit purposes. This would be a judicious use of these abandoned railways.

If this is approved, it will probably help avoid many misunderstandings, problems and criticisms, while also saving time, work and energy.

For all these reasons, I will support the bill, even though I think that there is still room for a lot of improvement and that it would have been better to make these improvements before going further ahead.

For example, the minister could take the opportunity provided by the new VIA Rail Canada Act to promote transparency and accountability for this crown corporation, particularly as regards the appointment of its board of directors and its advertising which, unfortunately, is often confused with propaganda.

I must say that, as someone living in the heart of Lévis, I would love it if we could silence the train's whistle once and for all.

• (1650)

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like first of all to congratulate my colleague from Lévis—Bellechasse for his excellent speech. Just like me, he comes from the municipal arena. I would like to make something clear for the men and women who are listening to us. My colleague will certainly recognize like me that it is impossible for municipalities to apply the same regulations regarding noise that they apply elsewhere on their territory. Those who live near railways or railway yards have a hard time understanding that.

One must understand that municipal regulations do not take precedence over federal laws. Thus, since railway transportation is a federal jurisdiction, any regulation which a municipality might adopt to try to restrict the noise is automatically inapplicable on federal territory. Obviously, the bill does not go as far as applying the municipal standards. This has been requested for a long time by municipalities, who would like the federal government to understand one day that there is a need to discipline the industry. This is where the problem lies.

During the last session, I had the opportunity to be transport critic. I now have the infrastructures and communities file. Among other things, I visited communities located near the Charny yard, in my colleague's riding, and near the Moreau yard, in the riding of my colleague from Hochelaga. When we meet those people, we hear their distress. Technology has changed. Engines and cars are no longer being linked to each other by human beings. Everything is done mechanically and electronically. And believe me—I have heard it for myself—it does not decrease the noise. To make sure that the linking—which is done mechanically and electronically—is done properly, more force has to be used. Consequently, there is more noise.

I would like to ask my colleague to tell the House a little bit about the impact of this new technology on communities. I would also like him to say a few words about the municipalities not being able to apply their own standards to restrict noise, even though they would simply like to apply the same standards as with other industries. They cannot do it in the case of railway transportation because federal laws take precedence over municipal regulations and provincial laws. Municipalities cannot enforce their regulations about noise.

Mr. Réal Lapierre: Mr. Speaker, first, I want to thank my colleague for his question. I know that he visited some sites, including the Charny railroad yard. I also know that that yard is in the heart of a residential development. The problem has become really alarming for people who live in the immediate vicinity of that yard.

Furthermore, I know that the railway that goes through the heart of the city is also a problem. At any time of night we can hear the train

Government Orders

whistle, whose sole aim is to wake everybody up. Even though people have been pushing for action, nothing ever changes. I had hoped that the bill would alleviate the problems.

I am also perfectly aware that we cannot enforce existing regulations in cities and towns and that the federal legislation takes precedence. But the fact is that we remain stuck with the problems. What is more upsetting is that, in my riding, the railway makes a loop that comes very close to a village to facilitate delivery of a liquid product in Montreal. At any time of day or night, we hear whistles—more like non-stop whistling—because the number of trains is constantly increasing.

In conclusion I will say that, despite its positive elements, the bill does nothing to alleviate the noise problem. There is practically nothing in it other than a complaints processing mechanism to guarantee that the complaints are heard. I do not think that this bill will satisfy the people who have been complaining for a number of years now.

• (1655)

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Marcel Proulx): It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the question to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, National Defence.

Ms. Beth Phinney (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this may be my last chance to speak in the House as I will be retiring on election day. I guess my comments are directed toward the transport bill because I have been fortunate to use Air Canada and other airlines in Canada to travel to and from my riding.

I would like to thank the people of Hamilton Mountain, my constituency, for allowing me to represent them for 17 years. It certainly has been a privilege.

I would like to thank everybody who helped me get elected and has helped to keep me elected. We cannot do it on our own. They have helped me accomplish my work in the riding and across the country. Sometimes it is with a phone call or a letter, or sometimes it is with a cup of tea. However, it is those people who keep reminding us and phoning us, and saying we are not doing this or we are not doing that, or could we do this who keep us on the ball and ensure that we are doing our job right.

I would also like to thank my colleagues in the House, the staff in the House of Commons and the staff I have had over the years for their support. I am doing this just in case. I have tried over the years to thank everybody who has helped, but I always miss out on somebody. So I am hoping that I can cover everything now.

Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends who, as we all know, get neglected during this period of time. There can be months and years that we do not speak to our friends or have time to spend with them. So now I will have some time to spend with them and I will be very happy to do that again.

It has been a great privilege to work here on behalf of my riding and on behalf of Canadians. Again, I thank everybody who has had anything to do with making my time here on the Hill more pleasant.

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Lapierre: Mr. Speaker, I did not hear a question in what the member across the way said. However, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the hon. member for her dedication and for the work she has done for her country. I am sure that most members, if not all, will say that she has devoted heart and soul to this. I wish her the best retirement which I hope will be much more quiet than what she has been used to until today.

• (1700)

Mr. Marc Boulianne (Mégantic—L'Érable, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would also like to wish a good retirement to my colleague across the way, and to congratulate my colleague, the hon. member for Lévis—Bellechasse, for his speech.

Of course, when the subject is rail transport, we talk about noise, profitability and economy.

In our region, Chaudières-Appalaches, as in that of the hon. member for Lévis—Bellechasse, the Quebec Central is part of the rail heritage. This line was ceded by Canadian Pacific and taken over by a salvage committee created in the area to prevent its dismantling. A promoter, Mr. Giguère, with the help of several other individuals, took charge of the Quebec Central. It was an excellent initiative. It was at the time of the CFIL initiative, creating regional short lines to transport tourists as well as goods from Saint-Romuald to Sherbrooke, through the regions of Beauce, Chaudière-Appalaches, Mégantic—L'Érable and Thetford Mines. This is a significant and sustainable economic activity.

Here is my question. Can my colleague confirm that it makes sense that the responsibility for certain rail lines, such as Quebec Central, for example, be entrusted to cities and towns for the transport of citizens, tourists and goods?

Mr. Réal Lapierre: Mr. Speaker, I would first like to thank my colleague for his brilliant comment.

I too have followed the events surrounding the Québec Central train. The stakeholders have discovered that such a projet could still have an economic value. The efforts made allowed the export of a good number of finished products to the American side. We can therefore only rejoice to see such an initiative, just like the Kyoto agreements.

Because we live by the St. Lawrence River, we hope that cabotage will one day be allowed again, particularly for raw materials.

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak in the debate on Bill C-44. We fully believed that the government wanted nothing to do with this bill. I know that the member for Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher has worked hard to ensure that there would be a debate on this bill.

I am not saying that this bill is perfect; we do, in fact, have concerns in some respects. However, it contains provisions—especially section 32, which I will talk about in greater detail—that increase the powers of the Canadian Transportation Agency to mediate complaints in communities with railway lines. Obviously, every member of the House, both on the government and the opposition benches, knows that Canadian Pacific or CP has engaged in extremely delinquent behaviour. It has even been a rail rat, a

locomotive low life and, quite often, behaved like a city within the city. This is certainly true in a city such as Montreal.

The bill should have gone further, as the Canadian Federation of Municipalities said, because the scope of section 32 is not clear. It is being compared to a superior court order, but when we read the wording, it is unclear that this is not just mediation.

That said, before I talk about the substance of the bill, I want to make some comments about the current political situation.

Obviously, the House is humming with energy. It is clear that the government is about to fall and that we are writing a page in the history of this Parliament by allowing, finally, our constituents to get their bearings with regard to the Gomery report, all 455 pages of which I just finished reading this morning. Clearly, the most important of the 17 chapters is the last one, about assigning responsibility. It is interesting to see that Justice Gomery is able to clearly identify the centres of responsibility. Treasury Board and other departments had completely abdicated their responsibilities, which was to ensure the proper administration of public funds. The extreme disrespect for Quebec referendum legislation is obvious.

Indeed, we must remember that the creation of the Gomery commission was rooted in a cabinet decision made in 1996. During a retreat, on February 1 and 2, 1996, the federal cabinet decided to authorize a vast visibility plan for Canada. This grand plan came as a reaction of the government to the 1995 referendum, where the yes and no sides were each allowed 50¢ per elector. Therefore, there was a possibility, based on the equality of opportunity principle, to promote, on the one hand, the possibility for Quebec becoming sovereign, as 147 countries in the world have done, or, on the other hand, Quebec remaining part of the Canadian federation.

What is disturbing, and that is the meaning of the next election, is that a government chose not to respect a democratic referendum. A government chose not to respect the rule of law.

In the 455 pages of the report, we can easily see that Coffin, Brault, Lafleur Communications, and actually all five agencies that Public Works and Government Services Canada had hired, made generous contributions to the Liberal Party, with obvious contempt for the political party financing legislation.

That said, I do not want to stray too far from the bill before us. I am well aware that it deals with transportation. However, before getting to the main point, that is Bill C-44, I also wish to congratulate all members, on both sides of the House, who have served their fellow Canadians and who might be in this House only for a few more hours before going on to another career. In particular, that is the case of the member for Saint-Maurice—Champlain who will be leaving public life.

Government Orders

● (1705)

Liberal colleagues have told me that some thirty of them could be leaving public life. I imagine that it has nothing to do with the difficult situation the party currently finds itself in, but rather a perfectly reasonable and legitimate desire to do something else in life.

I am convinced, however, that they will have positive memories of their colleagues and the Bloc Québécois, which has remained a party of balance between the desire and interests of the government and of the people of Quebec. The Bloc Québécois has always been on top of what could be done here in this House under the standing orders in order to advance matters affecting the interests of Quebecers.

Madam Speaker, I believe that this is also your last day in the House, since you have announced you are not going to seek another term.

In my riding of Hochelaga, there is a marshalling yard. This is not surprising, since Hochelaga—Maisonneuve was one of the first neighbourhoods in Montreal to be industrialized. Obviously in the 18th century and 19th century, where industrialization was involved, the ability to link people and to move goods near an industrial centre was an extremely important consideration for businesses when they located.

Hochelaga—Maisonneuve was a city between 1888 and 1918, when it joined Montreal. It was in fact the first city in eastern Montreal to have a francophone industrial middle class. The Dufresne family, for example, held positions on the city council.

Anyone visiting Hochelaga—Maisonneuve can admire its rich heritage in the Centre culturel et sportif de l'Est, an art deco piece today housing an organization of the same name providing cultural and recreational services. The château Dufresne was, for a long time, the only middle class home open to the people of Montreal, where Marius Dufresne once resided. More recently, singer Diane Dufresne, of whom I am a fan and with whom I had the pleasure of having my picture taken—she is in a way Quebec's prima donna—presented an exhibition of photographs. This château is witness to the past prosperity of Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, which was once an extremely prosperous middle class city.

Still, industrialization and railways go hand in hand. It is rather distressing to note that, in a residential neighbourhood like Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, at the heart of my neighbourhood, a railway ran along Ontario Street. This was not unusual. It was a time when people thought that economic and residential development should co-exist.

Today, of course, when we think about urban development and municipalities adopting a development plan, we would not tolerate, in the middle of our neighbourhood and in residential areas, nuisance factors such as a railway.

However, in the 18th and 19th centuries until the second world war, people wanted to have economic development close to residential development. A whole generation of labourers worked as railway employees in Hochelaga—Maisonneuve. I was pleased that the member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel came to meet me with my constituents.

● (1710)

About a year and a half ago, he left his riding on a Thursday night to come and meet my constituents. I created an antinoise committee. People living on Davidson and Darling streets as well as those living in the western and the northern parts of my riding, near the railway tracks, got together to make representations to ensure that measures would be taken to reduce the impact of railways.

What are these nuisance factors? First, the fact is that railways may be operating 24 hours a day. People wonder how it is that we can tolerate, in a city such as Montreal, in 2005, soon in 2006, a railway that can be operating 24 hours a day. Since this is the case, it means that there is noise associated with the operation of this railway. The noise comes from two sources. Of course, there is the stopping of engines, of locomotives, but there is also noise when locomotives are joined together. You can appreciate that this causes a lot of noise.

There are people who have been living for 10, 15 or 20 years near this railway and who are wondering what that government will do. This is why the member for Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher was well-advised to pressure the Minister of Transportation, the member for Outremont. This is, by the way, a riding which the Bloc Québécois will not hesitate to conquer in the next election, thanks to our candidate of great ability, Mr. Jacques Léonard, president of the Quebec treasury board under René Lévesque. He is a progressive social democrat eager to defend any cause which has to do with the fight against poverty.

The Minister of Transportation has therefore waited too long before bringing in his bill. We were wondering what was happening. This is a bill which my colleague, our transportation critic, would have liked to improve in committee. Nonetheless, one of its provisions has given a little bit of hope to our citizens.

First, one must remember that, for many years, the Canadian Transportation Agency behaved just as if it had the authority to make orders and to act as a mediator, something which has just been granted to it through Bill C-44. A legal challenge has been taken to federal court. If I am not mistaken, I believe that the case was even heard by the Federal Court of Appeal. This court decided that, unfortunately, the authority of the Canadian Transportation Agency did not allow it to make orders and to go as far as it went in the past. This is why the Minister of Transportation should remedy to that situation and establish clearly, in a bill, that it is indeed possible for the Canadian Transportation Agency to act as an arbitrator.

As I said, the CPR and the CN, the major railway companies, have been behaving like low lives in the city. They were under the impression that, in the name of prosperity and economic development, they did not have to account to anyone. It has taken every ounce of persuasion and kindness which I am known for to convince the CN and the CPR to participate in the noise control committee I had set up. These companies were behaving like railway low lives, like railroad delinquents, not accounting to anyone. That is why clause 32 of the bill is giving some hope to our fellow citizens.

Government Orders

What is not clear to me is to what extent clause 32 really allows orders to be made. I will read the clause for the benefit of those listening. It states:

When constructing or operating a railway, a railway company must not cause unreasonable noise, taking into account—

● (1715)

I can already see a problem with the phrase “not cause unreasonable noise”, as it refers to the legal test of reasonableness. What does “not cause unreasonable noise” mean? For example, is it unreasonable to couple two engines at 3 p.m.? Is it unreasonable to let a train idle for 40 minutes between midnight and 0:40 a.m., with the noise this involves?

I hope that the Canadian Transportation Agency will issue guidelines, as provided for by the legislation, to define what is unreasonable when it comes to major national carriers.

Clause 32 states:

When constructing or operating a railway, a railway company must not cause unreasonable noise, taking into account (a) its obligations under sections 113 and 114 — (b) its operational requirements—

The phrase “its operational requirements” is pretty generic. One might even say that it is general, because it is not clear what it is referring to exactly. Naturally, a company could always plead before the Canadian Transport Agency that its operational requirements require it to be in operation 24 hours a day.

I recall my discussion with the railways, particularly the companies in my riding which service the Port of Montreal. They referred to the necessity, given the importance of that port, to ensure the fastest possible connections. That is why they had no scruples about operating around the clock.

Now for the third criterion to be considered: the location of railway construction or operation. As I have said, when one looks at a city like Montreal, back in the early days of urban planning, it was not uncommon to find residential and industrial areas in the same place, because workers had no cars and needed to be as close to possible to their work place.

Today, of course, there are ecological concerns. Our party has a good record on this, moreover. The Bloc Québécois was the one to obtain a tax deduction to encourage our fellow citizens to take public transit. I myself have no car, and I live between two metro stations, Pie IX and Viau. I get around on public transit.

What is more, in order to encourage our fellow citizens along this path, the Bloc Québécois wants to see monthly transit passes made tax-deductible. The member for Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, our party's transport critic, got that passed in the House. Although there was no unanimity, it was still a very significant vote. I congratulate my hon. colleague on it.

Now, continuing with the obligations under clause 32. It reads:

The Agency may issue and publish, in any manner that it considers appropriate, guidelines—

These are the powers of a quasi-judiciary tribunal, which is what the Transportation Agency is and thus empowered to issue orders that are enforceable.

I have only a minute left, and I would not want to disappoint you, Madam Speaker, on your last day in this House. In conclusion, the Bloc Québécois would have been pleased to be able to work in committee to improve Bill C-44, the principle of which we support. We would, however, have liked to have beefed up its clause 32, which offers our fellow citizens a glimmer of hope.

● (1720)

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Madam Speaker, first I want to congratulate my colleague from Hochelaga for his excellent speech on Bill C-44. I would also like to recognize the hard work of my colleague from Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher who forced the Minister of Transport to reintroduce Bill C-44, which was first introduced as Bill C-26 in the previous Parliament. That bill was deferred and I was then given the opportunity to stand up for it.

My question for my colleague from Hochelaga is as follows. I attended one of his committee meetings where he invited industry officials. I was somewhat disappointed with what the industry had to say, especially with regard to noise, because it was essentially a monologue. They tried to make us understand the problems they faced. They stressed there was nothing they could do and that, all and all, the neighbours were the ones who did not understand.

I wonder whether the fact the minister took so long to reintroduce this bill has anything to do with the industry's lobbying to prevent the study and adoption of this bill. Often, when industry sees problems in a bill or investments that would have to be made—or even sanctions or fines—or when it feels threatened, it begins to lobby. Finally, the transportation agency must have some authority.

I would like to know whether my colleague, who has a talent for mediation—I have seen it—and legal training as well, agrees with me that the industry might have put on some pressure and lobbied to prevent this bill from being introduced quickly.

● (1725)

Mr. Réal Ménard: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for such an insightful question. It is the sort of question we have come to expect from him in this House. I know that he is very happy with his new responsibilities but that he still has fond memories of his time as transport critic. We appreciated his work.

I have two comments. It is hard to understand that the government did not consider this a priority. How could it wait so long? Without the great perseverance shown by the transport critic, the member for Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, I am not sure that the minister would have come around. I do not mind doing a little mediation, but when we talk with our fellow citizens, it is clear that we need legislation to back us up. The message that this late introduction and the hesitations of the Minister of Transport is sending is that, as far as the government's intentions go, we are concerned about the quality of our fellow citizens' lives.

Government Orders

However, I think that the content of clause 32 should be beefed up. We need to put teeth into it to ensure that domestic carriers, particularly the railways, will have a price to pay if they do not respect a minimum quality of life.

The Bloc Québécois is also realistic. We know that, in Hochelaga, the railway companies will not be expropriated. We need to consider some sort of coexistence. Those who live near the tracks and the railway companies have to find a *modus operandi* that keeps everyone happy.

I have to admit that I have never been impressed by the efforts made by the railway companies to invest in the quality of life. What my fellow citizens from Hochelaga wanted was some sort of anti-noise barriers like we see elsewhere. It might not be perfect, but it certainly is a reasonable mitigation measure to ask for.

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak today on Bill C-44, whose title bears repeating: An Act to amend the Canada Transportation Act and the Railway Safety Act, to enact the VIA Rail Canada Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

This is an important bill. In fact, it is an exact copy of Bill C-26, which the government had introduced in the previous Parliament. This is surprising, since this bill, when it was introduced the last time, was almost a national emergency. We had worked hard in order to make the government understand that some parts of the legislation needed to be reviewed and amended, but there was suddenly an election. The current Prime Minister decided to call a snap election and, ultimately, the bill died on the order paper.

So it is surprising to see this bill introduced once again, when we know full well that this government will fall today. We are talking about it, but everyone in the House is well aware that this bill will not, once again, be passed in this parliamentary session.

Ultimately, members are here, particularly when considering bills such as this, to defend the interests of their constituents. Earlier, my colleague from Lévis—Bellechasse told the House about the potential problems in his riding due to the Charny yard. Likewise, my colleague from Hochelaga just talked about similar problems experienced by the constituents in his riding due to the noise from the Moreau yard, in Montreal.

Clearly, the Bloc Québécois wants to resolve these problems. As my colleague from Hochelaga said so well, the unrelenting efforts of my colleague from Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher forced the Minister of Transport to re-introduce this bill. We wish it had been introduced last spring, but it was put off. The Minister of Transport made that decision. I am always surprised to see the member for Outremont tearfully defending public interests when he knows full well that the public deserves to see its interests defended on several fronts with regard to transportation. He will not have done so, because once again, this bill will go no further.

The problem of citizens who live close to railroad yards in Quebec and in Canada and are bothered by the noise of whistles will not be solved because the bill will not be adopted by this House, even though the Bloc Québécois wants to take part in the debate, discuss the bill and move it to the next step. That is what we would want.

However, it is worth talking about the bill today. It is by talking about it and explaining its importance to Liberal members that we will surely see it adopted during the next Parliament.

The bill has four parts: one on railway transport; a second one on air transport; a third one on complaints; and finally, one on VIA Rail. As for railway transport, it is a rapidly evolving market. We saw the rail market go through a low and it is now picking up momentum. All those who saw railway lines disappear here and there in Canada will be surprised to see new advocates for railway transport or new stakeholders in the area.

I had the chance to experience the situation in my former incarnation. Before being a member of Parliament, I was reeve of Papineau regional county municipality. There still is a railroad in Papineau. It now belongs to an independent corporation which manages it under the name Quebec Gatineau Railway. At one time, Canadian Pacific wanted to dispose of the railroad and transfer responsibility for it to the adjacent landowners. I was one of the first persons to intervene and say that the Outaouais did not have a highway. At the time, there was no highway 50 and it has not been completed yet, but it is in the development phase now. That could be the subject of a debate at a later date. So losing the railway meant losing all industrial development potential.

• (1730)

We had no road networks, no highways and we were losing the railway. All the mayors from the communities and municipalities along that track got together. Since the track was going to be removed, everyone got together and agreed that it made no sense to do so. There was potential, industries and clients. Canadian Pacific waged an all-out war until, because of my position as chair of the Outaouais economic council, we made an offer to Canadian Pacific. We simply told them that since they thought the track may never be profitable to them, they could offer it to independent railway owners.

Believe or not, when the call for tenders went out, CP got eight responses, thus eight potential buyers. This railway is in operation today and is called the Quebec-Gatineau Railway. It is a shortline. It is therefore run by an independent, privately owned company. It is a profitable company and it allows the entire region to still develop its industry and have the railway as an industrial benefit.

However, other regions were not as lucky. Train tracks have been removed and others are on the chopping block. The purpose of this bill, among other things, was to allow defunct railways to be handed over to the municipalities and public transportation agencies first.

Government Orders

My riding starts in Gatineau and ends at the border of Saint-Eustache, at the edge of the Montreal urban community, which currently includes Mirabel. In the coming years we hope Mirabel can benefit from light rail public transportation. That would help in the development of the entire Saint-Augustin sector, the entire Saint-Janvier region and other regions as well. These sectors could benefit from rail transportation. For the Mirabel—Saint-Janvier sector, I am referring to the Little Train from the North, which no longer exists today. Some corridors could reopen and light rail could be used for public transportation.

The purpose of this bill is to allow transfer of companies directly to public or municipal transportation agencies wanting said companies for public transportation purposes. There is a strong will on our part.

As we were saying earlier, one of the major concerns is noise. A policy needed to be established because too many people were complaining about being disrupted by the rail industry's operations.

I was asking my colleague from Hochelaga earlier if he did not think that one of the reasons this bill had come so late, and the Minister of Transport, the member for Outremont, had waited so long before bringing it forward, was because of the pressure and the lobbying from the railway industry. That is one of the main reasons. When we talk about changing the industry operations, about forcing it to comply with viable noise standards, the industry only sees big expenses. However, it is simply about how things are done. We have to change the way things are done.

Earlier, my colleague was referring to a noise barrier, to the construction of a soil fence which could block the noise in a whole sector. So, such solutions are not unthinkable. The problem is that the industry must change its operating methods.

Today, we no longer connect the railway cars and the locomotives by hand. It is done mechanically and electronically. To ensure that they are well connected and will not get disconnected, the connections are louder and louder, and more and more forceful. This creates noise, which causes damage. The communities living near the railway yards are more and more inconvenienced by the noise.

I was the president of the Quebec union of municipalities from 1997 to 2000. What the municipalities wanted was to be able to apply municipal antinoise or noise limitation bylaws to railway yards or to railway transport areas.

• (1735)

The federal government obviously rejected this possibility, because—as we know—there is the whole situation in which, in constitutional terms, federal laws take precedence over provincial laws, which take precedence over municipal laws. The government did not want to give up its right in this case. So it has to regulate noise. The problem is that there has never been any regulations on noise in federal legislation on transportation.

Today, they are proposing one possibility. My colleague from Hochelaga—Maisonneuve mentioned it earlier. Clause 32 is a beginning. The transportation agency—prior to today and the passage of this bill—had only qualified mediation powers. That is, it made recommendations to the industry. However, if the industry

paid them no heed, then the transportation agency had no authority to force it, to provide a fine or to have the work done and to bill it.

The next version of the act should change that, we hope. Clause 32, which amends the Transportation Act, provides, “When constructing or operating a railway, a railway company must not cause unreasonable noise, taking into account—”.

So this is the first time the federal government would impose a standard on noise pollution on the railway transportation industry. Noise is in fact pollution. I will spare you all the studies that have been tabled. I had the opportunity to receive them from all the defence organizations. Noise pollution definitely exists. The human ear can tolerate a certain number of decibels. Beyond this level, the noise is intolerable and can make people deaf or ill. Obviously, it causes stress and many other symptoms. International studies have proven it. Furthermore, noise at nighttime must be quieter than in the daytime.

As my colleague from Hochelaga mentioned, in the marshalling yards, the problem lies in the fact that railway transportation runs 24 hours a day, to the detriment of the quality of life of people living near these yards.

I am calling on the railway transportation industry: you have to stop telling us that railroad yards were built before residential sectors and that people should not have built houses there. Let us never forget that, when these yards were first created, it was in areas that were developed or that were going to be developed and, in the end, houses were built around these industrial facilities. Today, understandably those who bought these houses can object to something that was not anticipated in the 17th and 18th centuries. Such is the reality.

This bill is a step in the right direction and that is why the Bloc Québécois would have supported it. We wanted to work in committee and to improve this legislation. That will not be the case, because the Minister of Transport took too long to reintroduce Bill C-44, which is a carbon copy of former Bill C-26. The minister cannot claim that this initiative required a tremendous amount of work. Of course, it is a rather large document of more than 90 pages, but it is a carbon copy of former Bill C-26, which had been introduced in the previous Parliament and which died on the order paper, because the Prime Minister and former Minister of Finance decided to call an election in the spring of 2004.

Today, in order to better understand this whole issue, it must also be realized that Bill C-44 sought to implement the VIA Rail Canada Act, which would have created VIA Rail. In fact, VIA Rail already exists, but this legislation would have made it an independent company. The only criticism that the Bloc Québécois could make—as is still the case—has to do with the fact that, currently, VIA Rail is still not subject to the Access to Information Act.

Government Orders

I remind the House about the Gomery commission and what happened regarding VIA Rail's president, Mr. Pelletier. He was in the hot seat a lot. He testified before the Gomery commission. He used VIA Rail's money to buy advertising from ad companies which were receiving kickbacks that were then given back to the Liberal Party.

• (1740)

That is what was revealed by the Gomery commission. The concern with this bill is essentially that it does not make VIA Rail subject to the Access to Information Act. There is no way of knowing how much the president or any of the employees are spending. Were lavish dinners held at the time when Justice Gomery released the reports on VIA Rail? There is no way of knowing if major expenditures were made or if the president treated his cronies to dinner. There is no way, because the Access to Information Act cannot be used to look at what is going on in this crown corporation, VIA Rail.

I am pleased to say that the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, on which I sit, asked the information commissioner to produce a bill, given that the government did not want to amend its Access to Information Act.

I am proud to say that, in the bill he submitted to our committee—which, incidentally, was reported on and, in turn, the report was unanimously passed by this House—the Information Commissioner of Canada, Mr. Reid, expressed the wish that a legislative amendment be passed as soon as possible, requiring VIA Rail to comply with the Access to Information Act, to allow members of the public, MPs and journalists to request documents from VIA Rail, with the exception of anything having to do with trade secrets. Any information on trade secrets would not come under the new Access to Information Act. The Minister of Transport could have dealt with this issue regarding VIA Rail. With the bill before us, he could have decided to immediately bring VIA Rail within the scope of the Access to Information Act—which has not been done—while at the same time protecting trade secrets; after all, we would not want VIA Rail to reveal its trade secrets.

What we do want is for VIA Rail and its employees to be required to disclose their expenses, so that we can get a clear picture of what the president of VIA Rail did, which was to buy advertising, or documentaries, singing the praises of Canada and making frequent investments that allowed ad agencies to pocket sizeable commissions.

The sponsorship scandal is based on this: take the people's money, the taxpayers' money, which our fellow citizens worked hard to earn with the sweat of their brows. They entrusted their tax dollars to the government. Then the Liberal government decided to give out contracts, directly or indirectly through such agencies as VIA Rail, to communications firms to promote and publicize Canada, or to private companies. There was a kickback system in place, however. This was termed a commission, and ranged between 15% and 20% of the total. It was pocketed by the communications agencies and then they gave part of it to the Liberal Party of Canada.

If I had not mentioned Canada in my explanation, many people listening to us would have thought of numerous other countries where there are dictatorships. In some of those countries, the

taxpayers' money is used for other purposes, and that is what is happening here in Canada.

That is why the public and the opposition parties have decided today to defeat this government, to say it no longer has our confidence, for the pure and simple reason that we never again want a government in Canada to take the hard-earned money of its tax-paying citizens and use it for partisan vote-getting purposes. We never again want to see a government award contracts to advertising agencies, with generous commissions attached, and for those agencies to make contributions to the Liberal Party in return. We never want to see that again. That is why, today, this government will be defeated.

Obviously, what we have before us is a bill on transportation. Transportation is always important in our eyes, but it is also important for the government to understand today that, whether it be VIA Rail, Canada, Post, the Department of Public Works and Government Services, or all the money it can spend in advertising and promotion, the public will never again allow it to take its money, buy advertising, hand out bonuses or commissions to agencies, and then get kickbacks from them for the Liberal Party coffers.

• (1745)

Hon. Claude Drouin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister (Rural Communities), Lib.): Madam Speaker, first, I would like to sincerely thank the people of Beauce for giving me the opportunity and the privilege to represent them here in Ottawa. It has been a wonderful experience for almost nine years, and I sincerely thank them for it.

I would like to thank my family who have been willing to make many sacrifices. I appreciate their understanding. It is my turn now to make a sacrifice in order to spend more time with them.

I wish also to thank the many volunteers who worked for me to ensure the realization of great projects in our region, Beauce.

I also wish to thank my colleagues on both sides of the House. We have had the opportunity to work together for the well-being of Canadians. We recognize the importance of the House and the work it does.

If I had one wish, it would be to ensure that we adopt measures so that those who want to go into politics and have a family could have a schedule that is more suited to their needs, because it is really hard. I have a 20-month old child and I can tell you that it is hard to be in Ottawa 26 weeks per year and practically five days a week. We should review the way we work so that those who want to serve the well-being of the public, in keeping with democracy, can do so without constraints, whether they be family related or personal.

To conclude, I want to thank those who work here, on Parliament Hill, to serve politicians so that we are able to provide Canadians with the services they require. To all those men and women who work very hard, I say thank you.

Government Orders

Madam Speaker, I wish to thank you for giving me the opportunity to thank, once again, the people of Beauce for their support.

Since I have the time, I will thank those who have worked for me in my riding and here in Ottawa, for almost nine years now. They have made countless sacrifices to provide the best services possible to the population.

Once again, thank you all. I wish everyone success, health and happiness as the holiday season approaches. To those who are waiting for me, I extend my heartfelt thanks.

• (1750)

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Madam Speaker, I commend the member for Beauce. Let us put aside our political partisanship for a few minutes. The member has always been a hard worker and was always present in the House. Once again, I can understand that it is not always easy to strike a balance between work and family.

We hope the member for Beauce will keep up the good work and we wish him and his family many more great moments.

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am happy to have the opportunity to speak to questions and comments about this bill. From the time I became a member of Parliament until today, railway transportation has grown a lot. The traditional vision of railway transportation has been replaced by an environmentally friendly vision, and this is for the best.

One aspect of the present situation is not raised by this bill and deserves all of our attention. It should perhaps not be dealt with by the bill *per se*. It is the whole matter of security. Over the past years, we have realized that Canadian National's practices have led to important accidents which are not isolated cases. In my riding an accident took place in Sainte-Hélène de Kamouraska which could have been very serious due to a chemical spill. Also, there was a derailment near Montmagny.

I am wondering if we should not be trying to find a way, given the growth of railway transportation, to be able to look at the security aspects a bit more closely, to add resources if necessary. In this area, budget cuts are frequent. In the end, basic services are not provided. Maintenance is not adequate and mishaps occur, as we have seen. This is why I wanted to raise this issue.

To conclude, I would like to ask my colleague the following question. How does he see the future of railway transportation? Also, if this bill is passed when Parliament returns, will the new law be a positive factor to increase railway transportation, especially in view of the Kyoto accord?

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Madam Speaker, to answer my colleague's last question, I must say that rail transport is the future. Intermodal transport will be the solution. Quebec has the St. Lawrence river, this amazing navigable waterway that has existed since the dawn of time. Use of this waterway must be optimized, which it currently is not. Nevertheless, rail and marine transport represent the solution of tomorrow.

As for the member's first question, this is essential, because rail safety is a real problem right now. Businesses need to stop lobbying

and preventing the government from investing the necessary funding. Legislation must be amended, because, in my colleague's riding and elsewhere, a number of issues remain unresolved. We need only think of the Quebec City bridge, a file we have discussed recently and which the Minister of Transport is trying to resolve in the midst of disputes with CP.

The problem lies in the fact that the companies are responsible for maintaining the lines and the bridges. Herein lies the problem: do they have the means to do so? If not, the government has to adopt legislation under which it will pay for and complete such work, and then bill the companies, even if the latter have to make multi-year payments, so that our railways, bridges and culverts are safe.

The member for Outremont and Minister of Transport is squashing any such hope of that. He wants to launch legal proceedings against the industries and the latter say that they will defend themselves in court. Ultimately, safety issues will never be resolved by this Liberal government.

Like my colleague, the Bloc Québécois wants to defend the interests of our constituents by ensuring that the government will one day listen to reason and be able to undertake the work itself and bill the industry for it so as to ensure the public's safety.

• (1755)

Mr. Guy Côté (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, BQ): Madam Speaker, first, I wish to point out that I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Saint-Maurice—Champlain.

Madam Speaker, I understand that you are retiring from public life. It was an honour, every time, to hear you call the name of my riding. Had we been here longer, maybe one day you would have done it without hesitating. Anyhow, I was very pleased to hear you every time.

As has been mentioned on numerous occasions, we support the principle of Bill C-44. I wish to speak specifically to the part concerning rail transportation.

A railway line runs through the entire Portneuf RCM, in my riding of Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier. Indeed, rail is a critical component of intermodal transportation. Earlier, my colleague for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel talked about the importance of the St. Lawrence Seaway. There is a good example in the Portneuf RCM which, with the Portneuf wharf, combines very successfully sea transportation, rail transportation and trucking. I think of a number of businesses in my riding that rely on these three transportation modes, including Ciment Québec and Alcoa.

I wanted to talk to you more specifically about the railroad part, because one of the aspects of this bill involves trying to resolve certain irritants relating to intermodal and railway transport of goods. I can confirm, as can all of the people of Pont-Rouge and its environs, that the railroad runs very definitely on time. Every evening at 10 p.m., a train passes within a kilometre of where I live. It and its whistle can both be heard very clearly.

Government Orders

I know when I hear it it is time to turn on the television for the national news. It does not bother me all that much, because my house is some distance away from the tracks. However, a few years ago, I lived much closer to them. So, in addition to the noise of the train, there was the problem of the vibrations. We can all see glasses clinking together in the cupboard, in our mind's eye. It is annoying sometimes.

In principle, as I was saying, we support Bill C-44. Unfortunately, one of the negative aspects is that the provisions governing excess noise do not permit the limiting of other annoyances. I think the agency has the legislative framework needed to be given authority over annoyances. It does not perhaps go far enough in terms of oil and gas fumes and vibrations.

It will be noted that, in the context of C-44, and more specifically clause 32, reference is made to noise of a railway and more specifically, the noise near marshalling yards, which is an irritant met in a number of Quebec ridings. As I mentioned that can be a problem not just near marshalling yards. It occurs in the many villages along the shores of the St. Lawrence Seaway. I mentioned Pont-Rouge earlier as an example, but I could have mentioned the towns of the Portneuf RCM.

Clause 32 of the bill gives the Canadian Transportation Agency the power to examine complaints about noise to order the railway company to take certain measures to prevent unreasonable noise. It should be pointed out that, in its mediation, the agency must consider the railway company's economic requirements.

Consequently, again, as is often the case, we must find a balance between the comfort of residents, the comfort of citizens, the right to a relatively quiet private life and certain economic and commercial factors.

• (1800)

In fact, up until 2000, pursuant to section 95, the agency believed it had an extended power allowing it to force a company against which a complaint was made to limit disturbances to a minimum. However, the agency was using a power it did not have.

This is why, when certain people say that, and rightly so, section 32 of Bill C-44 does not give the agency as much power as in 2000, we must keep in mind that the old act did not allow it any recourse, either.

Moreover, section 95 is not amended by Bill C-44, and the requirement for minimal disturbance during the operation of a railway line stays the same. This section empowers the agency to reconcile the need to allow rail companies to do business with the right of residents to live in a reasonably peaceful environment. Accordingly, the agency will be empowered to order a railway company to undertake any changes in order to prevent unreasonable noise, but it must take financial factors into account.

The orders of the transportation agency are like orders of a superior court. Anyone who contravenes such an order may be guilty of contempt of court and may be liable to imprisonment.

Accordingly, as I said earlier, the Bloc Québécois supports the principle of Bill C-44. Indeed, there are a number of provisions,

especially in this section, that allow the agency to regulate, up to a point, the noise aspect of rail transportation.

However, there are still a number of criticisms. If this bill is introduced again in a future Parliament, one will need to be raised. Actually, besides noise, the clause does not provide for other nuisances to be curtailed. The Bloc Québécois believes that the agency has the necessary regulatory framework to give it jurisdiction in terms of fumes, such as oil and gasoline, and vibrations. It would be very important that these elements appear in any future incarnation of this bill.

Ten minutes go by very quickly. I was talking about the possibility that this bill be introduced again in a future Parliament. Allow me to take my remaining few minutes to thank the constituents of Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, who put their trust in me in June 2004. In all likelihood, within the next hour, a very rare event will take place in this chamber: thanks to a very clear motion, the opposition will withdraw the confidence it previously placed in the government. All my constituents in Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier know that I will run again for the Bloc Québécois. I hope that they will put their trust in me again, like they did in June 2004.

Let me conclude by saying that we are in favour of Bill C-44, even if some of its clauses need to be reviewed.

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): Madam Speaker, I also want to take advantage of this opportunity. This is likely the last chance I will have to speak during this Parliament since the government will fall in less than half an hour.

I want to thank my voters for the confidence they have in me. I also want them to know that I am counting on them to renew this mandate of confidence for a seventh time. I am thinking of my constituents from the beautiful Bécancour RCM, the Nicolet RCM and the Bas-Richelieu RCM, which make up the great riding I have been representing for 21 years now.

I have a question for my colleague on Bill C-44. He gave some strong arguments on the interest the municipalities have in enacting stricter noise regulations. In my region, for example, there is the small municipality of Aston-Jonction, which often complains about the railway traffic that overruns its beautiful rural municipality. In Saint-Joseph-de-Sorel, the municipal council has often expressed disapproval of the work done overnight to switch railcars over. The same complaint is made in Sorel-Tracy, specifically in the Tracy sector. Of course we are in favour of this bill because it could partially resolve quite a few matters.

I want to ask a question of my learned colleague from Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier who spoke so eloquently about clause 32. I would like him to clarify the need for this clause or the questions he had about it.

Government Orders

I would also like to know whether he has any concerns about certain parts of the bill. For example, there is the fact that the agency no longer has to submit an annual report on the complaints it receives, or the fact that the head office can be moved by a simple order and not, as is usually the case, after consulting Parliament. There is also the fact that VIA Rail is not subject to the Access to Information Act. That annoys me somewhat since we often need to use that legislation since VIA Rail often drags its feet.

Once again I want to thank my colleague from Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier. He has been here for a year and, as I ask him this question, I also wish him much success. I have no doubt that he will be re-elected.

• (1805)

Mr. Guy Côté: Madam Speaker, of course, I wish the same to my valiant colleague from Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour and I thank him for his good words. Likewise, I am convinced that constituents of this wonderful riding—where I had the pleasure to go most recently to celebrate the member's 20 years in the political arena—will trust him once again with a new mandate.

My colleague mentioned a number of irritants. I must say that I totally agree with him in this regard. Too often, agencies, quasi-public or semipublic businesses take advantage of the fact that they are not directly under the control of the government to exempt themselves from the Access to Information Act. This is very unfortunate. Indeed, quite often, many of these businesses get public funds and very large sums of money.

Consequently, when we talk about the democratic deficit, about transparency in government spending, in politics in the noble sense of the word, it would seem normal to me that VIA Rail, for example, would be subject to the Access to Information Act.

We had a good example of this recently. I certainly do not want to bring back the sponsorship scandal to the House, but everyone remembers what happened at VIA Rail and the dismissal of its president of the board. Since this case is still before the courts, I will certainly not deal with it any longer.

As my colleague mentioned, there are still a number of things to clarify about Bill C-44. We will do so in the next Parliament.

• (1810)

Mr. Marcel Gagnon (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise in this House, probably for the last time.

I will take advantage of this debate on Bill C-44 to try and “keep on track”. As for transportation, I think I can say that I have travelled a lot, not so much by Via Rail or train, but rather by car. I live in a huge riding located four hours away from Ottawa. The geographic size of my riding of Saint-Maurice—Champlain is within 4,000 kilometres of that of Switzerland. It is not a riding, but rather a country that needs to be populated. The population of this small country, the size of Switzerland, is approximately 100,000.

This explains why we know a lot about transportation in our area. Unfortunately, we do not have everything we need.

The environment problem is one area of transportation that I consider important. We know that no mode of transportation will ever really protect the environment.

Coming back to Switzerland, one only has to go to Europe, to France for example, to see how transportation was developed in order to help the world and the human beings who need it, in harmony with the environment.

Obviously, a riding such as mine, with 100,000 inhabitants, cannot benefit from the same services as Switzerland. However, there are ways to adapt rail transportation in order to use it more and to use it better, and in order to protect people properly. Noise pollution due to railways is quite unpleasant, but the situation can certainly be improved.

Last week, I was disappointed that a bill I cared very much about was rejected at third reading. Today, perhaps one mayor in my riding will be happy about this bill since it seeks to improve the effects of the rail system on the environment and, among other things, it seeks to reduce noise.

The mayor of Saint-Tite, which is the capital of western culture, with a western festival of its own, often tells me that it is quite incredible that the railway going by this village bothers people in the middle of the night to the point where it is almost unbearable. Trains must be slowed down and barriers must be erected, because it is dangerous for tourists. Saint-Tite has 5,000 inhabitants. But during the festival, 150,000 people stay there. While being adapted to our needs, rail transportation must avoid problems related to the environment.

I am not going to discuss this bill clause by clause, but I hope that we will focus on developing transportation which is as ecological as possible.

I take the opportunity to thank you, Madam Speaker, and bid you farewell. I know that this is your last day in this Parliament, since you will not be running in the next election. You have been of great service to us. You did a good job chairing the debates in this House and it has always been a pleasure to work with you.

I want to take this opportunity to congratulate those who are here to serve us in this House. In a way, they take care of some of our transportation needs as they bring us our water, with a smile. All too often, when we see these people in the House, we tend to forget that they are here to serve us and that we should thank them for that. I want to thank them now on behalf of all my colleagues. Today, I had the pleasure of bringing them a rose so they can remember that they made our life easier. Even their smiles warm up this place and I want to thank them for that.

I also want to congratulate all those who, like me, will not be seeking re-election and are here for the last time.

• (1815)

I wish to thank them for the discussions we had, even for the arguments and the fights, for through it all, we have, I hope, moved society forward.

This Parliament is democratic in nature. If we want it to stay that way, I think we must have the privilege to use democracy. I hope the Prime Minister—I do not know if he will be re-elected and come back—will do what he said he would during the last election, when he talked a great deal about democratizing debate. He has not had much success with this yet. If he comes back, I hope he will work toward that or that the next prime minister will. It is the only way to ensure Canadians will get answers from government. We could get things done if we used this House as a temple of democracy.

Too often, we realize after asking 440 questions that we still do not have answers. It took an inquiry to finally get answers. To me, that is a serious infringement of democracy. I hope that in the future we will be able to use Parliament as a tool of democracy that nurtures democracy in such a way that Canadians have better access to what we do, are better informed about what we do, and encourage us to work harder to serve them better.

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Madam Speaker, you have always had a bit of difficulty with the name of this riding, but I will not miss this opportunity to wish you a happy retirement, since we are probably fast approaching the end of your mandate. I would also like to congratulate my colleague, the hon. member for Saint-Maurice—Champlain, who will also retire. I wish him a very happy retirement, and he certainly deserves it. I have been here for only a little more than a year, but it was enough for me to appreciate him greatly. I hope his successor will be as nice as he.

To come back to the debate on Bill C-44, I have a little story I want to tell members of the House. Last summer, I had the opportunity to make a trip to the Maritimes. My wife suggested that we take the train. The last time I had taken the train before that was in 1954, to go to Abitibi, where, incidentally, I received tremendous support and was elected in the last election. Voters from Abitibi are still really happy to greet me when we meet and I will be glad to represent them for a new mandate if they so decide.

But let me come back to my trip to the Maritimes. I was unpleasantly surprised by the instability of the tracks and by the noise. The last time I took the train, there was a whistle, now there is a horn. We were in the observation car, that is at the end of the train but I could still hear the horn which was sounded many times during the night.

I was also unpleasantly surprised to note that the content of the toilets is still flushed directly onto the tracks where children sometimes play or where people walk. I did not see anything in the bill to change that. Mention could have been made of new technologies to reduce noise and stabilize the tracks.

I therefore ask my colleague from Saint-Maurice—Champlain if he saw anywhere that kind of obligation imposed on VIA Rail or Canadian National.

• (1820)

Mr. Marcel Gagnon: No, Madam Speaker, I have not seen to what extent we can solve the problem.

I know we talk a lot about environmental problems related to noise, both inside and outside the train. As for the dumping of waste my colleague mentioned, indeed it is an issue that must be solved.

Government Orders

This is why, in the next Parliament, this legislation will have to be improved.

My colleague said he took the train to the maritime provinces. I take this opportunity to say that it is possible to make a wonderful trip to the north of my riding. It is a long way to communities like Weymontachie and many others in the northern part of my riding. They are totally isolated in the woods. However, my riding is worth visiting by train, and visitors can reach the most magnificent lakes. Thus, they can enjoy fishing and many other outdoor activities. I think my hon. colleague for Trois-Rivières has had an opportunity to ride on that train.

In addition, I take this opportunity to mention that in my area, the scenery is beautiful. Train transportation must be improved in all aspects, but in the meantime, it is available. And if people choose the train rather than a car or a truck, this mode of transportation is less damaging to the environment and its use would help the train to solve its own environmental problems.

[*English*]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to Bill C-44.

As I said earlier, I have two magnificent rail projects in my riding. One railroad goes through Alaska and it is one of the most successful railways in North America. A project is under study now which I have been talking to members of Parliament about for years. I have been asking for that railway to be joined with the rest of the Canadian railway system which would go through my riding of Yukon.

I would also like to talk about the White Pass Railway which goes from Skagway, Alaska—

An hon. member: A wonderful railway.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: It is a wonderful railway as my colleague said. It goes from Skagway, Alaska, up through the mountains. It was built a year after the gold rush and it was an engineering feat at that time. It is a very exciting railway for Canadians.

The railway system joined Canada from sea to sea which really helped tie the country together. It brought a number of disparate factions in Canada together. Joining francophones and anglophones and the first nations people of this country, and the various groups who have made this country their home, is a goal we should aim for.

I was a bit disappointed that we did not get to the next bill, which was the adoption bill with respect to children overseas getting their citizenship as soon as Canadians adopt them. This is not available to them right now. I have a number of constituents who have adopted Chinese children and it takes a long time for them to get their citizenship. I hope we can get this bill through the House very soon.

The railway symbolizes some of the things that our party stands for. We will be fighting for a vision of Canada in the upcoming election. The type of Canada we want to see is what we will be fighting for in the election. Through the official languages bill that we just passed in the House we are joining anglophones and francophones. This bill will increase understanding across Canada.

Supply

The refugee bill is still waiting and we have done a lot of work on it. We have done a tremendous job in bringing people from all over the world to Canada. These people make us a great nation. We have not asked them to assimilate and lose their culture, but instead, have asked them to celebrate their culture which makes Canada a great nation.

We have ambassadors all over the world who talk to various people which in turn helps our trade with other nations and helps to build a secure and peaceful world. Building a secure, peaceful and harmonious world is one of the goals and objectives of our party.

The Liberal Party has brought forward a number of bills to help people on lower incomes. Our nation is built on a strong economy and we can use that strong economy to help the needy. That is what we are going to be running on in this upcoming election.

I would like to acknowledge the members from all parties who are not running again. Everyone in this place is here because they believe in helping their constituents. They are honest about that and it does not matter what party they belong to.

I would like to ask the members from all parties to join me in congratulating the members who are not running again for their years of service. They include: the member for London—Fanshawe, Ontario; the member for Mississauga—Erindale, Ontario; the member for Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, Alberta; the member for Ottawa Centre, Ontario; the member for Verchères—Les Patriotes, Quebec; the member for Saint-Maurice—Champlain, Quebec; the member for Abbotsford, B.C.; the member for Okanagan—Shuswap, B.C.; the member for Kelowna—Lake Country, B.C.; the member for West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, B.C.; the member for Westlock—St. Paul, Alberta; the member for Peace River, Alberta; the member for Wetaskiwin, Alberta; the member for British Columbia Southern Interior, B.C.; the member for Avalon, Newfoundland; the member for Beauce, Quebec; the member for Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, Ontario; the member for Chatham-Kent—Essex, Ontario; the member for Hamilton Mountain, Ontario; the member for Simcoe North, Ontario; the member for Ottawa West—Nepean, Ontario; the member for Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, New Brunswick; the member for Victoria, B.C.; the member for Peterborough, Ontario; and finally the dean on the Liberal side of the House, a person who came here as a busboy washing dishes in the House of Commons and would accede to the highest level in the land as a cabinet minister, the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Ontario.

I would ask everyone in the House to join me in paying tribute to all those who have served in the House.

● (1825)

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Niagara Falls, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the comments of the hon. member and quite frankly, most of his comments were not directly related to the transportation bill, but I am sure were welcomed just the same by members who are retiring from the House of Commons.

With respect to this particular transportation bill, the hon. member talked about the highway system. I for one would like to have seen something more done for the national transportation system in this country and I think the hon. member would agree with me.

If we look at the Trans-Canada Highway and the great infrastructure programs of the past, have we seen that in this Parliament or indeed the last several Parliaments? I suggest to the hon. member that in fact it did not happen and much more could be done. One of the things I am very pleased about is the Conservative Party platform and its support of transportation infrastructure.

The hon. member and others could have mentioned the bridges and border crossings. That too has the important transportation component. Those of us in the Conservative Party believe it is absolutely essential that the bridges in this country and the border crossings work because people make investment decisions in this country based on whether they think those border crossings and bridges are going to be available for them. When money gets put into infrastructure, I support and applaud it, but I have said over and over again throughout this Parliament that not enough has been done in those particular areas.

The hon. member mentioned the railways. Which party's vision was it that built the railways to begin with? It was Sir John A. Macdonald and the Conservative Party. People can check out who was opposing that great father of Confederation, Sir John A. Macdonald. The descendants of those individuals are right across the aisle.

When we look for vision in this country, I invite everyone to look to the pages of Canadian history to see the great work that has been done beginning in 1867 by Sir John A. Macdonald. When the hon. member talks about railways, he has to talk about the Conservative Party and everything it has done.

The Conservative Party has a long history of supporting everything that is good and right to build this country of Canada. The Conservative Party helped begin Canada and we will take it forward in the 21st century.

* * *

● (1830)

SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—CONFIDENCE IN THE GOVERNMENT

The House resumed from November 24 consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: Order, please. It being 6:30 p.m., pursuant to order made on Thursday, November 24, 2005, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion of the member for Calgary Southwest relating to the business of supply.

Call in the members.

● (1850)

Before the taking of the vote:

The Speaker: Order. I wish to advise hon. members that there will be a reception following the vote tonight in Room 216 to permit hon. members to exchange season's greetings. All members are invited.

● (1905)

[*Translation*]

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

(*Division No. 190*)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Allison	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands)
André	Angus
Asselin	Bachand
Batters	Bellavance
Benoit	Bezan
Bigras	Blaikie
Blais	Bonsant
Bouchard	Boulianne
Bourgeois	Breitkreuz
Broadbent	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brunelle	Cardin
Carrie	Carrier
Casey	Casson
Chatters	Chong
Christopherson	Clavet
Cleary	Comartin
Côté	Crête
Crowder	Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
Cummins	Davies
Day	Demers
Deschamps	Desjarlais
Desrochers	Devolin
Doyle	Duceppe
Duncan	Epp
Faille	Finley
Fitzpatrick	Fletcher
Forseth	Gagnon (Québec)
Gagnon (Saint-Maurice—Champlain)	Gagnon (Jonquière—Alma)
Gallant	Gaudet
Gauthier	Godin
Goldring	Goodyear
Gouk	Grewal (Newton—North Delta)
Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells)	Guay
Guergis	Guimond
Hanger	Harper
Harris	Harrison
Hearn	Hiebert
Hill	Hinton
Jaffar	Jean
Johnston	Julian
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kilgour
Komarnicki	Kotto
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Laframboise
Lalonde	Lapierre (Lévis—Bellechasse)
Lauzon	Lavallée
Layton	Lemay
Lessard	Lévesque
Loubier	Lukowski
Lunn	Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Marceau	Mark
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Masse	McDonough
Ménard (Hochelega)	Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
Menzies	Merrifield
Miller	Mills
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	
Nicholson	O'Brien
O'Connor	Obhrai
Oda	Pallister
Paquette	Penson
Perron	Picard (Drummond)
Plamondon	Poilievre
Poirier-Rivard	Prentice
Preston	Rajotte
Reid	Reynolds

Richardson
Roy
Scheer
Schmidt (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Simard (Beauport—Limoilou)
Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul)
Sorenson
Stinson
Strahl
Basques)
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Tilson
Trost
Van Loan
Vincent
Wasylycia-Leis
White
Yelich— 171

Supply

Ritz
Sauvageau
Schellenberger
Siksay
Skelton
Solberg
St-Hilaire
Stoffer
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les
Thompson (Wild Rose)
Toews
Tweed
Vellacott
Warawa
Watson
Williams

NAYS

Members

Adams	Alcock
Anderson (Victoria)	Augustine
Bagnell	Bains
Bakopanos	Barnes
Beaumier	Bélangier
Bell	Bennett
Bevilacqua	Blondin-Andrew
Boivin	Bonin
Boshcoff	Boudria
Bradshaw	Brisson
Brown (Oakville)	Bulte
Byrne	Cannis
Carr	Carroll
Catterall	Chamberlain
Chan	Coderre
Comuzzi	Cotler
Cullen (Etobicoke North)	Cuzner
D'Amours	DeVillers
Dhalla	Dion
Dosanjh	Drouin
Dryden	Easter
Efford	Emerson
Eyking	Folco
Fontana	Frulla
Fry	Galloway
Godbout	Godfrey
Goodale	Graham
Guarnieri	Holland
Hubbard	Ianno
Jennings	Kadis
Karetak-Lindell	Karygiannis
Khan	Lapierre (Outremont)
Lastewka	LeBlanc
Lee	Longfield
MacAulay	Macklin
Malhi	Maloney
Marleau	Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
Martin (LaSalle—Émard)	Matthews
McCallum	McGuinty
McGuire	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
McLellan	McTeague
Minna	Mitchell
Murphy	Myers
Neville	Owen
Pacetti	Paradis
Parrish	Patry
Peterson	Pettigrew
Phinney	Pickard (Chatham-Kent—Essex)
Powers	Proulx
Ratansi	Redman
Regan	Robillard
Rodriguez	Rota
Russell	Saada
Savage	Savoy
Scarpaleggia	Scott
Sgro	Silva
Simard (Saint Boniface)	Simms
Smith (Pontiac)	St. Armand
St. Denis	Steckle
Stronach	Szabo
Telegdi	Temelkovski

Adjournment Proceedings

Thibault (West Nova)
Torsney
Valeri
Volpe
Wilfert
Zed — 133

Tonks
Ur
Valley
Wappel
Wrzesnewskyj

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

● (1910)

[*English*]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if anything demonstrates the culture of entitlement that has poisoned Ottawa and the reason the government has lost the moral right to govern, it has to be the government's record on military procurement in general, more specifically helicopter procurement. The fateful decision 12 years ago by the then finance minister and now the leader of the Liberal Party to politicize the purchase of the search and rescue helicopters is the scandal that will not go away.

I completely reject any comments from the Liberal Party that I am pursuing the culpability of the federal government over the deaths of helicopter pilots for partisan reasons. If my efforts to hold the Prime Minister accountable for the partisan political decision to cancel the purchase of search and rescue helicopters save the life of one brave pilot, I will consider my efforts a success. If anyone is playing partisan politics with the well-being of our soldiers, it has to be the Prime Minister.

I compliment the men and women who maintain the equipment in the Canadian Forces. It is a tribute to their skills that there has been as little loss of life as there has been over the years.

We owe it to the men and women we ask to put their lives on the line for Canadians to provide them with the best equipment.

Four years before the tragic accident that cost the lives of Captain Colin Sonoski and Captain Juli-Ann Mackenzie, the Auditor General warned the Liberals that military budget cuts were compromising the safety of Canadian troops.

In his report, the Auditor General stated the following, "The ultimate goal of defence procurement is...to build defence capability". Vehicles that cannot do the job do not represent good value for money. He stated:

The Griffon Helicopter best illustrates the implications of not enough money and inadequate analysis.

Operational tests that could have been carried out on the Griffon to assess the aircraft's suitability for military use were not done before acquisition. As a result, the Department is now discovering that the aircraft's capabilities are being stretched to their limits, particularly when the Griffon is used in applications that push its envelope, such as search and rescue operations.

That quote from the report of the Auditor General was provided to the Liberals four years before the tragic accident that claimed the lives of two Canadian soldiers, yet this Prime Minister chose to do nothing.

Just so Canadians who are watching these proceedings understand the context of this debate, even some Liberal MPs are disgusted by the way the Prime Minister plays politics with military procurement. At the public accounts committee, which reviewed the Griffon helicopter purchase, a now retired Liberal MP had this to say:

Quite frankly, I am getting a little tired of sitting here listening to all the equivocation...I am fascinated by the fact that someone admitted here today exactly what I said at the last meeting. It was a civilian helicopter which you painted brown....

In response, the department indirectly stated that budget cutbacks by the Liberal government forced the defence department to purchase what it could afford, to which the same member that I just quoted then said, "You have compromised".

The compromise of the Prime Minister when he bragged to Canadians about the deficit had a human cost that Canadians are now just beginning to realize. Canadians now know that a safety compromise became necessary because the right helicopter was the one cancelled by the Prime Minister.

Compromises in equipment cost lives. We can just ask the families of the soldiers where there was a compromise in equipment. The audit department went on to state for the record in committee that, surprise, surprise, "The problems...experienced with the Griffon were unexpected...Apparently there is something in our operational profile or climatic conditions that created problems".

While the Minister of Defence chose to respond to my question in a manner that ignored my reference to the Auditor General, the additional decision by the government to ignore the question of what is acceptable risk should have been considered in his response to me and to the men and women who are currently serving in Canada's armed forces.

It is relevant to quote Major-General Natynczyk. I asked him at defence committee what is "acceptable risk" for the Griffon helicopter pilots. His response to me was that while the goal is an acceptable level of safety, the Canadian Forces airworthiness program cannot foresee or prevent hazards to military aviation.

This is acceptable risk to the government, a government that has lost the moral right to govern. The time has come to restore accountability to the affairs of our nation.

Adjournment Proceedings

•(1915)

Hon. Keith Martin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this exercise illustrates the woolly-headed behaviour of the Conservative Party. The government was just defeated on a motion, yet the member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke wants to debate an issue. After the Conservatives have laid waste and eliminated the government of the 38th Parliament, after passing the non-confidence motion, in which they sided with the Bloc and the NDP, the member now wants to debate an issue and is expecting the government to do something about it. That nonsensical thinking and I am being generous in using the word “thinking”, illustrates what goes on within the Conservative Party. It makes no sense. It is illustrative of the type of intellectual discourse that would occur in their policy making if the Conservatives were to come to power.

I wish to inform those who are listening that Mr. Don Lindsay, who will be the Liberal member of Parliament for the riding of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke after the next election is someone who will not engage in such nonsensical, stupid, utterly absurd non-debates. The public should understand that.

To set the record straight on the military, the Liberal government has made the biggest investment in the last 20 years in our armed forces. The government has invested nearly \$13 million over the next five years. We are engaging in a massive transformation, including 5,000 personnel for the regular forces and 3,000 personnel for the reserves.

The government has streamlined the whole procurement process. The new procurement of our tactical lift aircraft to replace our Hercules is an example of what we are doing to streamline a process that has been too lengthy.

The Liberal government has gone much further than that. It has increased resources to personnel in the forces. The average wage in the Canadian Forces today is \$52,000 a year. This is a big difference from before.

We are also engaging in the procurement of the equipment that our Canadian Forces need, not what the government thinks the forces need. This ensures that the forces get the equipment in a timely fashion.

The government has also made improvements for our veterans with the new veterans charter. The government has put together the biggest change in 40 years in how we care for our veterans.

Our Liberal government has engaged in a massive transformation of our Canadian Forces. They will be an effective fighting force for the 21st century. It is the Liberal government that has done that. It has made a significant investment over the next five years that will continue on for the next 20 years. The transformation will make sure that Canadians are secure at home and abroad. Our forces will have the equipment, the tools and the personnel they need to do the job which they do so nobly.

At the end of the day those who are listening will have a choice when they vote in the next election. The government has put forward its policies for all to see on specific things such as transport, foreign affairs, children, the economy and working with the provinces.

The government has engaged in the biggest economic revival of our country in decades. Canada has the lowest unemployment rate in 30 years, and the most vibrant private sector since the 1960s. Canada has more jobs and more resources. There is more money in the pockets of Canadians. There is a reformation and a strengthening of our social programs.

The voters have to ask themselves which party has the specific solutions to deal with the issues Canadians care about. Compare what the Conservatives, the NDP and the Bloc have to offer and what those parties are prepared to do for Canadians. The government's record is on the line and it is one which we will put up against any of the other parties.

•(1920)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, Canadians trust government to act on their best behalf, even when problems are pointed out by the Auditor General, even when all too depressing events occur in Ottawa. The culture of entitlement that is being substituted for democratic governing in Ottawa means that the Liberal Party acts as though it can ignore the findings of the Auditor General. There is no accountability any more.

Things must change in Ottawa. Only with a change in government can accountability be restored to the democratic process in Canada. Only then will the Liberal Party be held responsible for all the bad decisions it has made, particularly when it comes to Canada's military and our place in the world today.

It is only fitting that today, on the last day of the government's being in power, we are talking about the decision it made on its first day in power, a decision that cost lives. It is time for an election.

Hon. Keith Martin: Mr. Speaker, this is the last speech of the 38th Parliament, and it may be my last speech. I do not know.

First, I thank the constituents of Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca who have given me the honour of representing them for the last 12 years.

I got into politics, like most members of Parliament, to serve the Canadian public. It has been dispiriting this year to see the level of discourse go down in such a guttural fashion. I hope in the future we all will come here to serve the public, to help those who are helpless, to save lives where lives need to be saved, to help the under-privileged, to strengthen our economy and to dream and aspire to our vision for Canada, for the great country in which we live and for which the honour has been betrothed upon us to serve our country.

I am an immigrant to Canada. We emigrated from England when I was a little boy. On a personal level, our country has given me so much and it has been my honour in this place to give back in some small way to the country that I love so much, Canada.

The Speaker: The motion to adjourn the House is deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:22 p.m.)

Adjournment Proceedings

The First Session of the 38th Parliament was dissolved by Royal Proclamation on November 29, 2005.

CONTENTS

Monday, November 28, 2005

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Criminal Code	
(Bill S-19. On the Order: Private Members' Business:)	10183
Suspension of Sitting	
(The sitting of the House was suspended at 11:05 a.m.)	10183
Sitting Resumed	
(The House resumed at 12 p.m.)	10183

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Transportation Amendment Act	
Mr. Chan (for the Minister of Transport)	10183
Bill C-44. Second reading	10183
Mr. Hubbard	10183
Mr. Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)	10185
Mr. Batters	10185
Mr. Gouk	10186
Mr. Bagnell	10189
Mr. Siksay	10190
Mr. Batters	10190
Ms. St-Hilaire	10191
Mr. Bagnell	10193
Mr. Siksay	10193
Mr. Lessard	10194
Mr. Julian	10194
Mr. Siksay	10197
Mr. Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	10197
Ms. Catterall	10198

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Kawartha Participation Projects	
Mr. Adams	10199
Ukraine	
Mrs. Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul)	10200
Greater Charlottetown Area Chamber of Commerce	
Mr. Murphy	10200
Rail Transportation	
Mr. Blais	10200
Member for Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	
Mrs. Ur	10200
Electoral Campaigns	
Mr. Goodyear	10200
BioNorth	
Mr. McGuinty	10201
Fabory Metrican	
Ms. Demers	10201
Federal Court of Canada	
Mr. DeVillers (Simcoe North)	10201

Income Trusts	
Mr. Solberg	10201
Member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore	
Ms. Augustine (Etobicoke—Lakeshore)	10201
New Democratic Party	
Ms. Davies	10202
Riding of Etobicoke—Lakeshore	
Mr. Van Loan	10202
Grey Cup	
Mr. Lemay	10202
Conservative Party of Canada	
Ms. Ambrose	10202
Clare Laking	
Mr. Powers	10203

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Canadian Taxpayers Federation	
Mr. MacKay	10203
Mr. Goodale	10203
Government Spending	
Mr. MacKay	10203
Mr. Goodale	10203
Mr. MacKay	10203
Mr. Goodale	10204
Income Trusts	
Mr. Solberg	10204
Mr. Goodale	10204
Mr. Solberg	10204
Mr. Goodale	10204
Public Safety	
Mr. Duceppe	10204
Ms. McLellan	10204
Mr. Duceppe	10204
Ms. McLellan	10204
Mr. Duceppe	10204
Ms. McLellan	10205
Mr. Duceppe	10205
Ms. McLellan	10205
Terasen Inc.	
Mr. Layton	10205
Ms. Robillard	10205
Health	
Mr. Layton	10205
Mr. Dosanjh	10205
Income Trusts	
Mr. Kenney	10205
Mr. Goodale	10206
Mr. Kenney	10206

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