



CANADA

# House of Commons Debates

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OFFICIAL REPORT  
(HANSARD)

**Tuesday, December 12, 2006**

—  
**Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken**

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# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, December 12, 2006

The House met at 10 a.m.

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*Prayers*

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## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

•(1000)

[*English*]

### MAHER ARAR INQUIRY

**Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table today the policy review report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Actions of Canadian Officials in Relation to Maher Arar. Issued under part I of the Inquiries Act, the report is entitled “A New Review Mechanism for the RCMP’s National Security Activities”.

[*Translation*]

On behalf of the Government of Canada, I want to sincerely thank the commissioner of inquiry, Associate Chief Justice of Ontario, the honourable Dennis O’Connor, for his work over the past two and a half years.

[*English*]

We will carefully review all of the implications of this report and respond in a formal manner in the near future.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

### CANADIAN AIR TRANSPORT SECURITY AUTHORITY ACT

**Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to section 33 of the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority Act, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian Air Transportation Security Authority Act Review Advisory Panel, entitled “Flight Plan: Managing the Risks in Aviation Security”.

\* \* \*

[*English*]

### QUARANTINE ACT

**Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario,**

**CPC)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-42, An Act to amend the Quarantine Act.

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

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## COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

CANADIAN HERITAGE

**Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the tenth and eleventh reports related to Telefilm Canada and the twelfth report related to the Canadian feature film industry by the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

**Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present the twenty-fifth report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding the membership of the legislative committee on Bill C-30, An Act to amend the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999, the Energy Efficiency Act and the Motor Vehicle Fuel Consumption Standards Act (Canada’s Clean Air Act).

•(1005)

**The Speaker:** Pursuant to Standing Order 113(1) the report is deemed adopted.

(Motion agreed to)

\* \* \*

### ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES READJUSTMENT ACT

**Mr. John Maloney (Welland, Lib.)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-395, An Act to change the name of the electoral district of Welland.

He said: Mr. Speaker, this is a bill to change the name from that of one municipality within the riding, which actually consists of five different municipalities. We would like to change the riding name to Niagara Centre South, which is very similar to the name that represented roughly the same area in the 38th Parliament and before that. I would ask respectfully that the House consider the renaming of the riding.

*Routine Proceedings*

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

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**COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE**

## AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

**Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I move that the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, presented to the House on Wednesday, December 6, be concurred in.

This debate, while on the specific motion of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, has a series of questions in it that we believe should be used in any future plebiscite on the Canadian Wheat Board, but it is about much more than just those questions.

This debate is really about governance, justice and fair play. This debate is about a Prime Minister who is enforcing his ideology on prairie grain farmers regardless of whether farmers agree with him or not. This debate is about undermining the democratic principles that exist within Canada.

I will turn first, to emphasize this point in terms of democratic principles, to an article in the *Red Deer Advocate* by an individual by the name of Ken Larsen, who said:

Stephen Harper's Conservatives have identified an internal enemy that does not fit their ideology. Using their power as the government, they have started a campaign of suppression and disruption supported by a flood of propaganda and misinformation, utilizing the federal bureaucracy.

The target of this attack, an organization 100 per cent funded and democratically controlled by its members, has been permanently stripped of its right to free speech by ministerial order.

Their organization is also the subject of Harper government propaganda attacks on almost a weekly basis—

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order. The member has been here a long time and knows he cannot do indirectly what he is not permitted to do directly. He keeps mentioning the Prime Minister by name. I wish he would stop doing that.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** I apologize, Mr. Speaker. I was quoting from an article. I will quote the article and I will insert the words “the Prime Minister”. It states:

Their organization is also the subject of [the Prime Minister's] government propaganda attacks on an almost weekly basis; it is restricted by a cabinet directive from expending any corporate resources to defend itself. These attacks come in the middle of this organization's democratic elections for membership to its board of directors.

Obviously this is now not just about a question on a plebiscite; it is about a government so driven by ideology that it is willing to undermine our reputation abroad as a trading nation, a government that is willing to weaken our credibility as a trading nation and the respect our grain markets have, with an economic cost for producers. It is about a government that is willing to use misleading propaganda, a strategy that really strays from the truth.

Why are we having this debate? Why did the agriculture committee put forward this motion in the first place? It is because the government, which calls itself the new government, cannot be trusted. It cannot be trusted to allow a fair question. It cannot be trusted to abide by the Wheat Board Act itself. It cannot be trusted to abide by democratic principles.

Farmers actually believe the minister will try a trick question, one that would mask what the government is really doing. That is why farmers forwarded these questions to the committee and asked that we as a committee at least put these questions forward so that a fair question could be asked of farmers if indeed there is a plebiscite called on barley and wheat.

These questions put forward by the farm community are clear and I ask Parliament for its support in this matter: a clear question on any plebiscite that may be held in the future.

Farmers are right not to trust the government, because this has been the issue all along. The government has tried to mask what the debate really is, and indeed, although now the Minister of Agriculture stands up on an almost daily basis and claims he is turning to farmers in a plebiscite, what did he say some while ago? I will quote the minister.

In the spring the minister failed repeatedly to support a plebiscite by producers. At the Senate agriculture and forestry committee on October 3 of this year, he stated, “I have not had a plebiscite and I do not have plans for a plebiscite”.

The parliamentary secretary was soundly defeated in terms of his theory that farmers in his riding wanted to do away with the pro-marketing board Wheat Board directors. In the election on the weekend in his riding, the farmers voted 66% in favour of a pro-Wheat Board single desk selling director, but the parliamentary secretary for the Canadian Wheat Board told the agriculture committee on October 25, “For me, the issue is not about a plebiscite”.

However, on October 31 of this year, the minister announced that a plebiscite will be held on barley marketing. It is a good thing that there will be a plebiscite, but it really should be on both barley and wheat at the same time.

What I am saying is that we really cannot trust the government in terms of the Canadian Wheat Board issue. Let us look at the Prime Minister's trickery itself. On April 6 the Prime Minister said in the House, “The government will empower producers by allowing them to have dual marketing options when it comes to the Wheat Board”.

● (1010)

The government has now changed its mind. It is not talking about dual marketing anymore. There is no question that the government, in the last election campaign, did campaign on dual marketing. While the Prime Minister may have promised something in the election, he really did not have the authority to carry it out because it is farmers themselves who should make those choices.

What we are seeing is that the government is now all about changing the language. When we listen to the minister's response or the responses of members opposite, they are no longer talking about dual marketing, which they campaigned on during the election. They are now using new words, “marketing choice”. Why?

*Routine Proceedings*

**Mr. Dave Batters:** What is the difference?

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** There is a huge difference. The government has its republican spin doctors up here. Farmers understand what dual marketing is. It means no more single desk selling. However, in terms of marketing choice it sounds better so the government is listening to the spin doctors because the words sound better. It is more deception by the government opposite and it believes that by using the words "marketing choice", it will be able to confuse—

● (1015)

**Mr. John Williams:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I have been listening to the member opposite go on at length talking about deception, trickery and other things by specific members on this side of the House. While the words might be quite appropriate in the terminology, I think the inference is quite disparaging.

I would ask, Mr. Speaker, that you caution him and suggest that if he is trying to explain his point he do so without his disparaging remarks about the government and ministers on this side.

**The Deputy Speaker:** I am sorry to report to the hon. member for Edmonton—St. Albert that I do not find anything that has been said by the hon. member for Malpeque to be unparliamentary. The members opposite may find it unacceptable to them but that is a matter of debate.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Mr. Speaker, I can understand that the member opposite does not really want the facts on the table.

In terms of the wording, I was trying to explain that the government is now using the words "marketing choice" because those words sound better, but it is really the same thing. It is a deception and the member knows it.

Let us look at what the minister had to say in *Hansard* on June 7 when he was not using the words "marketing choice". He stated:

—during the campaign, there was a clear and honest question put forward. We said at the time that our party believed that there was a good future for the Canadian Wheat Board. It involves dual marketing....

In a moment I will get to why the government changed the words to "marketing choice", because it really hides what it is doing.

The minister appointed a stacked task force that had no pro-Wheat Board supporters, only opponents. The chair of that task force was a very credible senior civil servant. This is what he had to say on what marketing choice means. In the report he stated:

"Marketing Choice" is a better term to describe the new environment than "dual marketing". The latter term implies to some that the existing marketing approach (a CWB with monopoly powers) could co-exist with an open market approach. This is not possible.

The words changed because "marketing choice" is more deceptive. The report actually states that dual marketing is not possible. Those are the facts. Have the new government members not been saying all along that they will go to dual marketing? Did members of the Conservative Party not campaign on dual marketing? Did the Prime Minister not campaign on dual marketing? I quoted him a moment ago.

The truth is now out. By the minister's own task force, dual marketing is not possible. The task force says that marketing choice means the same thing, and it does, but it sounds better in the farm

community. The Conservatives know that at the end of the day it will mean the end of the Wheat Board.

Let us turn for a moment to a group of academics who studied the task force report and looked at dual marketing and marketing choice. I will quote from a press release on that report. It states:

Though the task force report insists a new CWB "needs to have a high probability of success," the proposed changes to the CWB would not allow it to survive commercially.

Those are the words of Murray Fulton and Richard Gray. They go on to talk about the business case that is in the task force report and say, in conclusion, that there is no business case for a viable Canadian Wheat Board II. It would be unable to obtain the strategic assets necessary to compete. They go on to say:

There are at least four reasons for this.

First, without grain handling facilities, particularly port facilities, the CWB II would be completely reliant on the existing grain companies to handle its grain.

The CWB would be unable to provide guarantees to customers since the existing companies would much rather handle the grain themselves than for CWB II. And purchasing key facilities from the existing companies is not going to happen, since these players have no interest in allowing a viable CWB II to enter the market.

Since CWB II will have no significant strategic assets, it will not be commercially viable. Given the expectation that it will not be viable, farmers will have no incentive to purchase shares in it and, as a consequence, CWB II is unlikely even to get established. Thus, the only marketing choice that a farmer will have is, "To which private multinational grain company should I sell?"

● (1020)

What it comes down to is that we give up the multiple marketing choices and options that are available through the Wheat Board and we end up with one: sell to the multinational grain trade. That is the choice.

The Conservatives can play with the words all they like. They can talk about dual marketing and about marketing choice but at the end of the day there will be no other choice for primary producers in this country but to sell to the multinational grain trade, and that is no choice at all.

The government is taking away the marketing power from the producers that they have collectively had for years and leaving them at the disadvantage of the multinational grain trade.

The sad part of this is that we are seeing the Government of Canada do from the inside what the multinational grain trade has tried for years to do from outside the country: to do away with the Canadian Wheat Board and eventually destroy it. We now have a government in Canada doing that from within the country.

Simply put, the government's objective, which is the Prime Minister's ideology and ordering his ministers around, is to eliminate single desk selling.

*Routine Proceedings*

While I do not think even government members realize it, it does mean that eventually we will lose the Canadian Wheat Board and lose that marketing power in the marketplace. Who gains? As I said a moment, it will be the international grain trade.

I will read two quotes from an article published in *Inside U.S. Trade* on October 27. The first quote reads:

The U.S. government for years through the WTO has tried to eliminate the monopoly powers of the CWB....

The second quote reads:

A U.S. wheat industry source said the timeline is not crucial to U.S. producers, so long as Canada eliminates the monopoly powers.

Who is overjoyed by the decisions that our government is making? It is the producers in the United States, the U.S. grain industry and the multinational grain industry. They are overjoyed by the steps that the government has taken to undermine the marketing power of grain producers in western Canada, an agency that gives them some market power and offers them a lot more choices than they would get when they only have the choice to market to the multinational sector itself.

I have tried to outline the net impact of the government's decision and the need for a clear question and for Parliament to speak to this issue. However, I want to tell the House what has basically happened from the time of the election until now.

What we have seen to date from the minister certainly does not instill faith that the government will do the right thing.

In all seriousness, I do not believe we have ever seen such abuse of ministerial power, unless it was the Coyne affair and the firing of the governor of the Bank of Canada by the then prime minister, John Diefenbaker, nor such a violation of democratic principles in Canada and such an undermining of the very laws that the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and his parliamentary secretary took an oath of office to uphold.

I will go through what has happened. It started with the election campaign but the election campaign was not a referendum on the Canadian Wheat Board.

•(1025)

Section 47.1 of the Canadian Wheat Board Act states that the minister should consult with the board and call a question of producers on changes to be made to the board. The Prime Minister promised something that he did not have the authority to provide, and that is right of producers to make that decision.

In any event we had the election. Shortly after in mid-summer, the Minister of Agriculture held a meeting in Saskatoon of anti-wheat board invitees. Even the Government of Manitoba, although it eventually went to the meeting, was not invited to participate. It was only invited to observe.

For other Canadians, what would they think if we were having a discussion on medicare and two provinces, say Ontario and Nova Scotia, disagreed with the Government of Canada, then a meeting was held but they were not invited to participate? Duly elected governments have the right to participate in that meeting. It was refused participation in that meeting by the minister. First, it was not

invited, but it pleaded its case. Then it was allowed to go, but it had to sit in the back and observe. The minister then started the process.

For those who do not understand, the Canadian Wheat Board is made up of 15 person board of directors, 10 elected by producers and 5 appointed by the government. Always the previous governments have tried to provide balance. They had business people who had business understanding in terms of the appointed directors. However, the mantra of the government opposite on appointments to directors now is one thing. They must absolutely be opposed to single desk selling, and it made its first appointment on September 15.

On September 19, the minister appointed a task force to look at dual marketing. I have quoted from that task force report in which it has said dual marketing is not possible. However, the people who were on that task force were all opponents to the board. Even the Wheat Board directors were asked, but they did not attend because they knew it was a set-up. There were only opponents on that task force. No witness list was provided, no list of meetings, no economic analysis of any kind of what its recommendations would do.

As I quoted from Mr. Fulton, it is clearly a discredited task force by the academic community as a task force with one objective, to come up with recommendations on how to move away from single desk selling of the board without outlining the economic impact on the farming community. The reason it did this is the Wheat Board provides, and it is well known, an advantage to producers about \$655 million annually.

On September 5, the election started for five directors of the Wheat Board. That is important. During that whole election campaign, the full power of the bureaucracy was out there propagandizing against pro-board directors.

On October 5, the government issued a gag order to the Canadian Wheat Board directors that they could not speak out and in effect would have a hard time doing their job.

On October 17, the minister directed that 16,000 farmers be removed from the electoral list itself, in the middle of an election campaign.

On October 26, a pro-wheat board director was fired so the government could replace him with an anti-single desk selling director.

On October 30, the task force report came down and, as we expected, it had no economic analysis and no list of meetings.

In November the standing committee agreed to hear from the president and CEO, but that eventually was cancelled and then was reinstated.

*Routine Proceedings*

I know I am running out of time, but I will make a couple more points. This goes to the essence of what we are as a country. Because the Wheat Board put on its website a critique of the task force report so farmers would know the implications of that, on November 17, the Minister of Agriculture sent this letter to the board, another directive. It said:

I ask that you instruct the CWB staff to immediately remove the CWB Response to the Report of the Task Force on Marketing Choice that was posted on the CWB website on November 6, 2006.

●(1030)

In other words, the minister went so far as to ask the Wheat Board to remove from its website proper information that farmers should know on the impact relative to what the consequences of the government's decision would be to producers. That is a violation of freedom of speech and it is a terrible thing to see that happen in Canada.

The most recent event is that the minister is about to fire the CEO, a man who has had 33 years experience in the grain industry, has credibility around the world and is the chief salesman abroad, because he does not agree with the government's policy.

This is a farm agency and it should be allowed to operate as a farm agency. It should make its decisions as a farm agency on behalf of the farm community. The government should stop interfering in the activities of the Wheat Board and allow farmers to make the choice.

The questions we have presented as a committee are clear and unequivocal. With these, farmers could make a clear choice.

**Mr. Gerry Ritz (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to take part in the debate today.

I was born and raised on a farm and have been farming for roughly 35 years. I have heard those same arguments for the whole 35 years. There has been no change at all in the position of that member and all western Canadian farmers who sit behind him in the peanut gallery. Wait a minute, they are from Ontario, which is not under our board.

The member went on to make a huge statement about multinationals sliding in and taking over. I will correct that statement. The multinationals like the Canadian Wheat Board. This single desk buyer gives them access to a constant flow of products at a far better price for them than it is for the producers who support it. This is a fact, and producers will tell us that.

The capacity of the Wheat Board has gone down over the years. Its market share is sliding terribly because of the way it is governed and run. Those changes will be made in time.

We are seeing value-added. We are seeing acres growing. Even the people who supposedly support the board are growing an abundance of non-board crops. We have not seen the multinationals slide in and take over this aspect of the farm. We also have not seen the multinationals slip in and take over the Ontario Wheat Board now that it is a market choice situation.

On what basis does the member make his statement that the multinationals will rush in and take over? We have not seen that happen anywhere else in the world and we certainly have not seen it happen in western Canada on the pulps and the non-board crops.

●(1035)

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Mr. Speaker, the member may farm in the west, but I do not know where he has been. As chair of the Standing Committee on Agriculture, he should know the power of the multinationals. It is not that they are moving in to do the farming. They are taking economic advantage of farmers.

Studies clearly have shown the benefits under the single desk selling approach through the Canadian Wheat Board. The benefits under a number of scenarios with the Canadian Wheat Board have been posted. The economic advantage to farmers collectively as a result of the Canadian Wheat Board's single desk selling approach and its ability to provide economic power to the farm community has not been refuted by anyone. The member knows that Canada's credibility in the international market is due to the quality grains that we export, or export through the Canadian Wheat Board itself. A lot of this will be lost should the Canadian Wheat Board be destroyed.

The multinational grain trade has faced 11 challenges from the United States. We have won every time the United States grain industry and the multinational grain trade has challenged the Canadian Wheat Board as a marketing institution because it benefits Canadian farmers. Now we have a government that will do the bidding of the multinational grain trade and the United States, undermining the board and taking power away from Canadian farmers. Those members should be ashamed of themselves.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague opposite for his comments and his strong support for the Canadian Wheat Board. The NDP has been raising this issue since the beginning. It is clear that the government is trying to weaken farmers' ability to take collective action in their own best interest. This neo-conservative government is trying to stop people from acting collectively in their own best interest in many other areas as well by doing things like cutting funding for Status of Women Canada and abolishing the court challenges program.

Does the member agree that when his government eliminated cooperatives and people's collective ability to build housing, it was acting exactly like the current government is in terms of that other ability?

[*English*]

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Mr. Speaker, when we look at cooperatives, the previous government was a fairly strong promoter of the cooperative system, both within the social housing community, the farming community and many others. However, there used to be a strong cooperative movement, the pool movement, in western Canada in the grains sector.

There used to be the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, the Manitoba Wheat Pool and the Alberta Wheat Pool. They were wholly owned by the farming community and their assets were built by that community. Those pools as cooperatives no longer exist. They have been taken over. Archer Daniels Midland has a 23% share in one of them.

*Routine Proceedings*

Those pools, when they were operating as cooperatives in western Canada, did their best to try to return economic advantage to the farm community because their shareholders were farmers. Today that is not the case. Some of the shareholders of the grain companies in western Canada are farmers, but many of them are not. As I mentioned, Archer Daniels Midland has a 23% shareholder in AgriCorp.

Shareholders are on the New York Stock Exchange. They come from around the world and they are not interested in the farmers any more. They are only interested in the profits to themselves. Therefore, the cooperative movement has been very much undermined in western Canada. The last barrier against being exploited by the grain trade internationally is the Canadian Wheat Board, and that is what the Conservative government is about to undermine and cut away.

• (1040)

**Mr. John Williams (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the member opposite, whom we all know is from P.E.I. He never advocates a single market for the potatoes that are grown there, but he seems to want to keep the farmers in the west under the domination of a socialist idea of the Wheat Board.

He uses phrases such as the proposals would undermine democratic principles and the essence of what we are as a country. As we know, Canada was built on the entrepreneurship of the great pioneers who developed it, who created the wealth and so on. It seems to me that the member opposite is absolutely opposed to anything for which our country stands and how we build a country. In fact, he went on to say that the people who were interested in profits were the people who were out to destroy Canada. He needs a little lesson on capitalism.

If he feels the Wheat Board single market is so good, could he tell us why the grain industry has been in such bad shape for generation or more? Farmers have gone bankrupt by the thousands. We would think, if he were such a great proponent of this wonderful idea, they would be so prosperous that everybody would want to emulate them, but the opposite is true.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question and the first part of the member's remarks noted that I happen to be from P.E.I. I spent 17 years in western Canada. I have probably been on a heck of a lot more farms than that particular member who happens to live in the west.

As far as promoting national marketing agencies, we have done it. We promoted a national potato board; however, the government of the day, and it was the Trudeau government I will admit, would not put it in place.

In terms of low farm incomes, I did a study and I would refer the member to it. It is called "Empowering Canadian Farmers in the Marketplace". The member should put that under his pillow and read it late at night. He might learn something in terms of why farm incomes were low.

The reason farm incomes were low is because everyone else in the agricultural industries, from processors to chemical companies, to grain companies, to transporters and to financiers, everyone involved

in the agricultural industry was making the biggest profits in the last two years while the farmers were making the lowest. Why? It is because farmers did not have power in the marketplace. That is why.

**Mr. John Williams:** The Wheat Board did not either.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** The Canadian Wheat Board does give them some power in the marketplace.

Yes, the returns are low out there from the grain industry. The Canadian Wheat Board allows Canadian farmers to maximize those returns back to primary producers in the industry through its marketing power. Of course it is not going to ensure them a profit; however, it is going to ensure them the greatest share of the returns that are in fact out there.

**Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary (for the Canadian Wheat Board) to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to point out something that may not be obvious to people and I would like to ask the hon. members a question. Are hon. members a little bit interested in why the member for Malpeque did not even talk about his motion this morning? The motion was brought forward at committee. I want to talk about it a little bit later, but members will notice that throughout his entire speech he did not talk about it, and that is probably because he is embarrassed by it.

I have been disappointed in him in a number of ways in the last couple of months. He has had two opportunities to bring forward concurrence motions this fall and unfortunately he has done both of them during scheduled committee hearings.

Earlier on we had a hearing and we were going to sit down and talk with the trade representatives from the U.S. embassy. The member for Malpeque decided that he would bring a concurrence motion forward that day. He did that. Those of us who wanted to hear about the important issue of trade with the United States at committee were not able to do so because he wanted to be in the House standing on his soap box.

Again, today we have an issue that is of importance at committee. We are talking about the EU's import system. It is very important in western Canada. I was out in Ontario last week meeting with farmers because this is really important. We finally got these folks to committee. What does the member for Malpeque do? He brings the motion to the House today, so those of us who are actively involved with the agricultural committee cannot be at the meeting for the full scope of the hearing.

The obsession he has with this issue has grown to the point where he is beginning to lose credibility. The committee has done some good work and I will admit that. Just last week we released a report on the Canadian Grain Commission. It was a review of the Canadian Grains Act and the Canadian Grain Commission. We made a number of recommendations that were very important.

We were able to bring that report forward unanimously from the committee. We thought we would be able to get some traction and some interest in that report because it has a number of very important recommendations for western Canada.



*Routine Proceedings*

I have never heard the member for Malpeque mention it once. He never mentioned it this morning. He supported the report. He thought it was a good report, but instead of saying that these are the positive things that the government is doing on which the opposition has been able to work with the government and that these are some of the things we are putting forward, he once more bashes the government and gets on his soap box on the one thing that has become an obsession for him, which is the Canadian Wheat Board.

As the member for Prince Albert pointed out, it is interesting that he does not live anywhere near the region in which the Canadian Wheat Board operates. He may have been in western Canada 17 years ago. That is a long time ago. He has obviously not been there lately and does not particularly understand the situation there.

The committee report last week made a couple of recommendations that are very important for western grain farmers. I want to talk about them because they are the kinds of things that will make the system in western Canada work. I will come to the motion a little bit later.

One of the things that was important, and we made sure with the help of the chair, the member for Battlefords—Lloydminster, was that producer cars in western Canada be protected for our producers. Over the last few years, more and more producers have turned to producer cars to move their grain. They load their own car. They ship it out to the coast and they are responsible for the grain that is in it. It has become a very important component of shipping grain off the prairies.

During the last election campaign when I was asked about it and about our commitment to it, I said that I am committed to these producer cars. I have used them for years on my own farm. They have been important to us. In fact, we were using them for years before the Canadian Wheat Board even supported them. The last couple of years the Wheat Board has got on board and said that it wanted to manage these cars and make sure that producers maintain access to them.

Some of us were using them for quite a while before the board even got interested. Actually, it only got interested after the number of producers who were using them became great enough that the board thought it was worth its while to be bothered with them. The report last week called for the support for producer cars and the enhancement of the option of using them.

Another thing we brought forward which we felt was important was that there be an office of grain farmer advocacy in western Canada. We brought that forward as one of the recommendations from the committee. Farmers would have an office associated with the Canadian Grain Commission that would stand up for their rights. There was a suggestion to have half a dozen commissioners who would be deployed regionally across western Canada, so if farmers had problems with grain handling, grain transportation or grain grading, they would be able to go to the office of grain farmer advocacy and have their problems dealt with. We think that is a really good recommendation.

We also made a recommendation with regard to changing the grading system in western Canada. For many years we have had in place in western Canada what is called the KVD system, kernel

visual distinguishability. That was removed by producers in Ontario 17 years ago. Because of the removal of that requirement in Ontario, they have been able to grow their industry. They have been able to bring a whole host of new products to market in terms of grains and cereals.

• (1045)

We felt it was about time that western Canadian farmers began to experience some of the benefits of that as well. Actually, opposition members from the Liberals, the Bloc and the NDP all supported those recommendations. I thought it was a very good report and I would have liked to have seen it get some attention.

Unfortunately, the opposition, particularly the member for Malpeque, has decided that it apparently is not important. He has something else that he is fixated on. The government would like to ensure that western Canadian farmers have the opportunity to know that report is out there and that it is going to be moving ahead.

Another important thing happened last Friday for western Canadian farmers. Bill C-2, the federal accountability act, was finally passed by the House of Commons for the final time and will receive royal assent shortly. This is going to give farmers access to information that for decades they have been asking for. They want to know what is going on at the Canadian Wheat Board. They want to know how their money is being spent on communication, political lobbying and those kinds of things. They are finally going to have access to that information.

In spite of the misleading information that was put out by the opposition, this is not going to force the Canadian Wheat Board to reveal all of its sales information to its competitors and those kinds of things. It would simply give farmers a tool to understand what is being done with their own money because it is their money that goes toward the running of the Canadian Wheat Board.

It has been disappointing to see the member for Malpeque ignoring the issues that are important not only to people in western Canada but also to his own riding. As I said, two committee meetings have basically been disrupted by his insistence on bringing these concurrence reports forward at this time. Both of those issues dealt with his constituency and his constituents in Prince Edward Island: the important issue of U.S. trade and what we wanted to discuss today in committee with regard to the EU's imports.

I am pleased to speak to this motion today. As we know, grain farmers in western Canada have chosen their directors for the next four years. That is going to be important. I was interested to hear the member for Malpeque this morning talk about the fact that he apparently does not want appointed directors to be farmers. He thinks they should come from outside the industry, but the minister has been good about that. He has appointed a couple of farmers to the board who would bring a perspective of experience in the business. I think there is going to be a good balance there.

*Routine Proceedings*

The newly elected and appointed directors are going to have a number of important issues to deal with, including the fact that this government is moving in the direction of marketing choice. The government looks forward to working with the board as it moves ahead and remains committed to providing marketing choice to western Canadian farmers while continuing to preserve the board as one of those options.

Speaking directly to the matter of this concurrence debate, I appreciate some of the other work that has been done by the committee, but there needs to be a couple of points made particularly regarding this motion.

Perhaps one of the reasons the member for Malpeque did not want to talk about the motion is that it was ruled out of order twice by the chair of the committee. It was ruled out of order on the first occasion because it clearly, in the chair's opinion, walked into the area of the minister's responsibility. I will talk about that a little later.

The member for Malpeque withdrew the motion. He understood that at the time, but decided that maybe political points were more important than actually dealing with the issue, so he reintroduced it again and the motion was ruled out of order a second time.

The second time it was ruled out of order was because when a motion is reintroduced, it is supposed to be substantially different than it was the first time and it was precisely the same motion. It was ruled out of order twice. The opposition on the committee obviously outnumbers the government at this point, so opposition members made the decision that they were going to bring this forward anyway. That is why we see it here today and I assume one of the reasons why the member for Malpeque really did not want to talk about the motion itself.

Another problem with the motion is that it is unbalanced. It does not deal with the real issues. There are a number of choices that will be available to western Canadian farmers. We understand that one of them will be that farmers would be able to market their grain and have the option of going through the Canadian Wheat Board as well. That is not included as one of the options. The member has again taken the extremist position that he has held in the past and has a motion that really does not have anything to do with the options that farmers want.

He is trying to come up with another extreme position. He wants to bring it before the House so he can get his three hours of debate, but in this case, ideology has once again trumped reality. It is a bit embarrassing for us to have to bring this motion forward when it was ruled out of order twice, as I said.

● (1050)

The member talked a little about intimidation. I think we need to spend some time talking about some of the tactics that have been used by the opposition in this debate. One example is the motion that has been brought forward today.

Last week on Thursday a very interesting thing happened at committee. We had invited a number of witnesses to speak on the Canadian Wheat Board issue. Mr. Jim Chatenay, an elected director of the Canadian Wheat Board, was one of the witnesses we had called. We brought him here to speak on Tuesday, but the meeting on Tuesday was cancelled because the board had decided it was going

to launch a legal action against the government. The chair had to check to make sure that we could hold the meeting, so we decided to hold it on Thursday.

While we were waiting for that meeting to be held, the steering committee for the agriculture committee had a meeting and decided that it was going to exclude Mr. Chatenay as a witness. He had been brought here. The committee had asked him to come and he was already here, but the steering committee behind closed doors decided that the witness list was going to be changed. We came on Thursday and the witness list was set. I want to make a couple of points.

Mr. Chatenay is a veteran of the board of directors. I told the committee that. He has been a strong voice for farmers and he had been at the committee all week. In any event I think there were reasons that the opposition had made a decision. Actually I brought forward a motion at the committee that Mr. Chatenay be allowed to sit at the table and the opposition voted against it and would not allow him to come to the table. I was wondering why that would happen, but I think there are some reasons.

In the early 1990s we had a crop in western Canada that froze in the fields. The farmers needed to get it to market in order to get their money out of it. As we looked for places to market it, the board basically said to us that it did not really think it could market that grain. It was not good grain and it was not sure it would be able to market it.

The farmers in our area, which is southwestern Saskatchewan, started looking around for another market. They went across the border. They took samples to the United States and they found out that the grain really was not that bad. Under the U.S. grading system the Americans were willing to give us a decent price for the grain. We began to set up a buyback from the Canadian Wheat Board in order to take our grain across the border.

We had a decent price for it. When we do a buyback with the board we have to give it all our sales information including the name of the company we are doing business with. It was not much later that farmers got a phone call from the company which said, "We do not need your grain. We are not going to buy it from you. We have as much of a supply of that type of grain as we want". We found out the price that it was offering for it was about 85¢ a bushel less than our farmers had been able to negotiate.

The bad thing about it was we watched the trucks come into our elevator, load up, and followed the trucks across the border to those same elevators. The board had taken the sale and offered it to these companies at about 85¢ a bushel less than the farmers themselves had been able to negotiate. We watched our wheat go out at that price. That of course started to make farmers angry and that really was the genesis of the 1990s opposition to the Canadian Wheat Board and an interest in marketing choice.

*Routine Proceedings*

Out of that of course there were farmers who moved ahead and decided that they wanted to move their grain into the United States. When they started doing that, the Liberal government started pushing back on them. Farmers went to court. Actually when they won in the courts, that same day, and the member for Wascana was the minister, the government moved to change the regulations so that the farmers could not do that. As the farmers won, the government counteracted, shut things down, changed the regulations on the fly so that what farmers were doing would be considered illegal.

Farmers went ahead and moved their grain across the border. The government arrested them—and the member for Malpeque is well aware of this—and at least a dozen farmers went to jail for periods of time ranging from a few hours to a couple of months. One of those farmers in particular was strip searched a number of times. I guess he was dangerous enough that the government felt it really needed to make an example of him.

What was really a concern about it was that it was not just one agency that was doing this. There were at least five government agencies that were involved in these activities. The RCMP, Canada Revenue Agency, justice, the Canadian Wheat Board and others were all ganging up on individual farmers just because they wanted a fair price for their grain.

Mr. Chatney was one of those farmers. We can begin to understand why the member for Malpeque did not want him at the witness table. He sits over there and laughs about it. It is a joke to him, but it is not a joke to western Canadian farmers who want some choice in marketing their grain.

• (1055)

A graph was circulated to MPs' offices last week from one of the western Canadian grain organizations. It shows that western Canadian farmers over the last year have received on average about 50¢ a bushel less than their counterparts in the United States. We continue to pay a price for just wanting to market our own grain.

Coming back to the motion, the committee report talks about recommending a plebiscite. The member for Malpeque knows that we are having a plebiscite. We committed to having a plebiscite in the new year. It is going to be on barley. It is going to be a clear question put to a broad base of voters. It is going to allow barley producers to vote on the future of their industry. That is the way it should be.

In the new year western Canadian farmers are going to be able to vote on a clear question of whether or not they would like choice on barley. We want to stress that the Canadian Wheat Board will be one of those options. It is going to be the option of selling one's own grain or the option of using the western Canadian Wheat Board to market the grain. For feed barley that is already the way it is. Farmers have the choice of going through the Wheat Board or going on the open market with their feed barley. With malt barley right now, they have to go through the Canadian Wheat Board. We want to give them the option of whether they want some choice in dealing with their malt barley as well.

It is very interesting how well our marketing system is working right now. In western Canada this fall, feed barley, which is on the open market, has been at a higher price than malt barley, which is

supposed to be the premium barley. Malt barley is supposed to receive the premium. It goes through the Canadian Wheat Board. It cannot react quickly enough to the market. The open market does react quickly. Farmers have been selling their barley onto the open market at a higher price than they can get for their premium barley through the Canadian Wheat Board.

The farmers themselves deserve to be heard. They will be heard in a plebiscite which will be held in January.

The report dictates what the questions will be and who should be able to vote. I want to point out that section 47.1 of the Canadian Wheat Board Act specifically grants the minister these powers. He has the full authority to develop the process for the vote, and I will quote from act so that it cannot be misunderstood.

The Minister shall not cause to be introduced in Parliament a bill that would exclude any kind, type, class or grade of wheat or barley, or wheat or barley produced in any area in Canada, from the provisions of Part IV, either in whole or in part, or generally, or for any period, or that would extend the application of Part III or Part IV or both Parts III and IV to any other grain, unless

- (a) the Minister has consulted with the board about the exclusion or extension; and
- (b) the producers of the grain have voted in favour of the exclusion or extension, the voting process having been determined by the Minister.

The member for Malpeque is quick to quote the act and demand rigid adherence to it, but he wants to ignore it, as he has done in his report, when it suits him. We need to point that out, that there are some serious inconsistencies here. On one hand he is up yelling and screaming about how the minister has to abide by this and that, his interpretation of the act and all that that means, and on the other he comes forward with a motion that clearly does not agree with the act itself. That does not bother him. He is here today. He wants to have his three hours of debate on this issue and he has brought forward a motion that basically violates the act.

The draft question that is offered in the report is one possible formulation. The Minister of Agriculture has said that he is going to listen to views about the question, but at the end of the day he is the one who is going to be developing the question that meets this commitment. He will be consulting as well.

The report also proposes to use a voters list that members on both sides of this House know includes people who are not barley producers. I guess the member for Malpeque should be answering the question about why it is that he is expanding the vote in his motion today to include people who do not grow barley and who are not included in the barley industry. I am not sure what his answer would be. Perhaps later he could give us some clarification on that.

The minister has promised to have a plebiscite question considered by a broad base of voters. That is what he intends to do, but that is not what the committee report proposes, and unfortunately I am sure the opposition members will be supporting it. They should think twice about that and I would suggest that they should reject it.

*Routine Proceedings*

I would also like to take issue with the fact that we often hear the charge that we are rushing through change. Nothing could be further from the truth. This House would be aware that in mid-September the minister launched a technical task force to explore the transitional and structural issues that might be encountered in the move toward marketing choice. The task force came out in late October. It recommends a phased in transition from a Wheat Board with monopoly powers to a marketing choice environment, preparing for change, launching the new Wheat Board with transition measures, and a post-transition period. It is a fairly comprehensive report that lays out some of the possibilities as we move ahead with change to the Canadian Wheat Board.

The task force was not marching to orders from the minister. It was giving advice to him. For example, the task force advised to start with legislative change, and we are glad to see that the minister has decided to start with consultations first. That is why at the end of October he announced the plebiscite on barley.

• (1100)

The plebiscite on barley is the only thing in the window right now. The board is going to remain in place. It will continue to be one of the options for marketing.

Canada's grain industry is open for business. That is the positive message that our customers overseas need to hear loud and clear. They do not need to hear some of the doomsday scenarios that have been coming from some quarters.

This is something that has had a number of us concerned. We hear from some of the people in the board and the provincial governments in Saskatchewan and Manitoba that the sky is falling. They have been screaming and exaggerating the consequences for some months. Now they tell us that some other people are actually listening to them when they say that.

The government is saying to the board, "Focus on marketing grain. Go out and do a good job of marketing grain for western Canadian farmers. As we bring some choice forward, you will have a lot more farmers who will support you as we move into that choice environment".

It is interesting that those on the other side decided to exaggerate the possibilities as far as they could in order to scare farmers. I guess the farmers are being scared by the rhetoric that they are hearing.

The government has been very clear. We made a campaign commitment to provide marketing choice to western Canadian farmers with the Canadian Wheat Board as one of those options. That is the direction in which we continue to move.

• (1105)

**Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would ask you to look into the accusation that the member opposite made relative to Mr. Chatenay coming before the committee.

I have before me the original notice of meeting for the December 5 meeting that the chair eventually cancelled. The timeframe on the bottom of this notice is dated November 24, 2006 at 4:14 p.m. If you want a copy of that, Mr. Speaker, I can give one to you. Mr. Chatenay's name is not on that witness list. The parliamentary secretary is dreaming in Technicolor on that point.

The parliamentary secretary is accusing the opposition of taking charge of the committee. The minister himself in his presentation to the committee asked the committee for suggestions. I will ask the parliamentary secretary a simple question, is that not true? He did. The committee is doing its work and providing him with advice in terms of what the question should be.

I have another question for the parliamentary secretary. Adrian Measner, the CEO of the Canadian Wheat Board, is about to be fired. He is a man of credibility with over 33 years in the grain business. This is what he said to the committee:

I have been asked to pledge support for the government's policy of eliminating the single desk, barring which I will be removed from my job. It would seem to me that opposition to the single desk should be far better grounds for my dismissal than unwavering support for the laws of Canada.

The gentleman opposite is the Parliamentary Secretary responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board. What Mr. Measner is saying in simple terms is he has been told by the minister he can break the law and keep his job, or he can maintain the law and lose his job.

Would the parliamentary secretary tell us, is that still the position of the minister, or is the minister going to allow this man to remain in that job? Mr. Measner has lots of credibility. He is still supported with the confidence of the board of directors. In fact, he was just reappointed in 2005. He has the full confidence of the board of directors in terms of maintaining his position as CEO. Will the minister say today in the House that that man should remain in that job so that he can continue to do a good job for western Canadian farmers?

**Mr. David Anderson:** Mr. Speaker, as usual, we hear exaggerated rhetoric from the member for Malpeque as his obsession with this issue continues.

The job of the Wheat Board is to market western Canadian farmers' grain, which is what the minister asked it to do earlier this fall. He told the Wheat Board that it should get out of the political advocacy role and go out and market western Canadian grain.

The reality is that the market is improving. It has come up a lot in the last few months. We expect that western Canadian farmers will benefit from that. We hope the board has not missed the sales opportunities that have been there, as it did a couple of years ago when it ended up running a deficit in the pool accounts because it was not paying attention to the market when it came up nor when it also dropped off and were not able to take advantage of the highs.

We are asking the Canadian Wheat Board to get out and market western Canadian farmers' grain into this rising market so western Canadian farmers can take full advantage of the market as it is improving.

The member for Malpeque wants to bring out original notices of meetings for the committee meetings. It is interesting that Mr. Measner's name was not on the original notice of meeting either. However, we sent in an amended witness list and Mr. Measner and Mr. Chatenay were both put on the list and both were brought here to appear at committee. Apparently the member for Malpeque found it was important that Mr. Chatenay not be heard.

*Routine Proceedings*

We are a little tired of those intimidating and threatening remarks and trying to embarrass witnesses who do not have the same position as the member for Malpeque.

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to this debate with fascination. The parliamentary secretary talks about intimidation and harassment from our friend over there in Prince Edward Island. I sat on the committee with him and I have to say that he has been relentless in his attack on the Wheat Board. It is not a vision of dual selling. It is an attack on the Wheat Board. It is an attack on a farmer-run operation.

Every time we ask a question, we are being told that because we are from Prince Edward Island or from Ontario that we do not represent all western grain farmers. I have been receiving hundreds of pieces of correspondence from western Canada and I have been phoning people in western Canada.

I would like to read a typical letter from someone in east end Saskatchewan. The letter is addressed to the parliamentary secretary, the member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands. The letter reads:

You claim you are being open and transparent about things, well, hiding behind closed door meetings, with handpicked invited guests, and issuing gag orders to anyone who speaks out against you, is being transparent all-right, anyone can see right through you!

Canada is a democratic country, and sooner or later I will get a chance to vote, be it on the future of the Canadian Wheat Board or the future of the member for Cypress Hills Grasslands, one thing is for sure, I will never support you!

That is just one of the hundreds of letters I have received.

I would like to hear the member's comments on how he interprets the fact that in the latest Wheat Board elections his cabal of enemies against the Wheat Board were soundly trounced. They were soundly defeated because western farmers do not support them and they do not support that member's relentless attacks on the credibility of the Wheat Board and on anyone who defends the notion of the Wheat Board.

• (1110)

**Mr. David Anderson:** Mr. Speaker, we can see the kind of rhetorical flourish that we have on this whole issue from people who really do not understand it.

What I have been relentless in is my interest in giving western Canadian farmers the same opportunities that farmers in other parts of this country have. It is interesting that in one part of this country people could be sent to jail for doing something that is perfectly legal in other parts of this country. That is ridiculous.

Western Canadian farmers want the same opportunity to participate in a rising market. We see right now that we are paying a penalty of about 50¢ a bushel to our American counterparts, and that is not fair. We want western Canadian farmers to be able to take full advantage of the market.

The member for Malpeque constantly refers to the former report he made that talks about farmers not having power in the marketplace. When we want to give them some ability to respond to the marketplace and to take advantage of opportunities, he and the NDP do everything they can to stop that.

I will continue to work toward giving western Canadian farmers the same opportunities as farmers across the rest of Canada have as they attempt to make their farms profitable.

**Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, a few days ago, at the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, the president and CEO of the Wheat Board and the chair of the Wheat Board made some interesting statements to which I believe the House would like to have a response.

The first statement was made by the CEO, Mr. Adrian Measner. He states:

The government's actions are also going to cost farmers money. You cannot make wholesale changes to the board of directors of a corporation with \$4 to \$5 billion worth of sales, gut its management team and restructure the grain-handling system without causing major upheavals and concern throughout the grain trade and most notably among buyers. I want to echo Ken [Ritter]'s comments about process and how it is most unfortunate that the government has chosen this precise moment—when some prosperity is finally returning to the grain sector—to create this degree of chaos and uncertainty both domestically and in the international marketplace.

Mr. Ken Ritter, the chair, said:

Western Canadian grain producers have just been through what could easily be called a "perfect storm": a cycle of low commodity prices, severely curtailed crops and high input prices. We are just rounding the corner. The 2006 crop, for the most part, was favourable both in terms of quality and quantity and prices have rebounded.

As a grain producer myself, I can say clearly and unequivocally: now is not the time to foist major changes on our industry. We need to catch our breath, we need to recover from the crisis we've just been through, we need to make sure that in growing and improving our industry, we do not take a step back into the abyss.

I would ask—

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. parliamentary secretary.

**Mr. David Anderson:** Mr. Speaker, again we hear fearmongering and exaggeration.

Canadian farmers, and western Canadian farmers in particular, grow high quality grain that will be sold around the world whether the Canadian Wheat Board markets all of it or if people have the opportunity to market their own grain.

I find it interesting that the member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River stood today to defend the Canadian Wheat Board because when the Thunder Bay Port Authority was in committee we heard that it could actually experience more growth through its terminal if western Canadian farmers had more options available to them.

We have been told that the Canadian Wheat Board is insisting that a vast amount of wheat be put on lakers rather than on shippers. The wheat is being loaded onto one ship and it bypasses Thunder Bay and is loaded onto another ship. Thunder Bay could actually benefit from western Canadian farmers having marketing choice.

I wonder why the member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River is not representing his own constituents.

• (1115)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Malpeque for raising this issue in the House today. There is no doubt that the Canadian Wheat Board is currently in jeopardy as a result of certain actions taken by the Conservative government for some time now.

*Routine Proceedings*

Regardless of their party colours and whether they are federal or provincial, governments are often accused of acting off the cuff. I heard the parliamentary secretary say earlier that this government was being accused of acting hastily in this file. I agree with him. This was not done in haste. This was not off-the-cuff. It has been a long-time goal of the Conservatives to dismantle the Canadian Wheat Board. This was not off-the-cuff.

We need only look back to 2002. On an opposition day, the current Prime Minister—at the time, a Canadian Alliance member of Parliament—moved a motion that already referred to freedom of choice. It must be understood that it is pure rhetoric to talk about freedom of choice, when what it really means is to impede the collective marketing system chosen by western farmers.

I will compare this to something happening in Quebec, even though I have been criticized many times for drawing this comparison. However, you will see that people are finding parallels between what is happening with the Canadian Wheat Board and with the supply management system in Quebec.

The last Conservative election platform included their plans to end the single desk model of the Canadian Wheat Board. This really is the culmination. As I said, quite a process has been established to put an end to the Canadian Wheat Board's single desk model.

Since the election, it has continued. They have established a committee whose membership comprises only those who oppose the Canadian Wheat Board. This way, when people from the board were invited to sit on the committee, they discovered that the committee intended to dismantle the Canadian Wheat Board's single desk model.

In addition, there was the famous ministerial order preventing Wheat Board management from defending the Wheat Board. That is rather ironic. The last time a government used a similar order in connection with wheat was when the Russians invaded Afghanistan, in the 1980s. Since the Canadian Wheat Board traded regularly with Russia, the government ordered an end to wheat shipments to Russia because of the activities in Afghanistan. It was obviously for a valid reason. Today, however, there is no justification for such an order.

Representatives of the board are in fact taking the government to court over the matter. I will not discuss this further, even though we have parliamentary privilege here. One thing is sure: the Conservatives intended to eliminate this single desk. When a member represents farmers, and his minister tells him that he can no longer do so, there is a serious problem.

Bill C-300 was introduced in the House of Commons by the chair of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food—a Conservative member, of course. The aim of that bill was also, ultimately, to dismantle the Canadian Wheat Board.

Just recently, there was the famous letter to Mr. Measner, the president and CEO of the Canadian Wheat Board, which was discussed at length earlier. In the letter, he was told he had to honour the government's position or see his head roll on December 14. He was threatened with dismissal if he failed to follow the line of the Conservative Party. I understand and I am not denying that the Conservatives and even this government are entitled to have objectives and to want to change things. Because it is democracy

that decides. However, I have a problem when people are intimidated and democracy is abused.

Furthermore, according to section 47.1 of the Canadian Wheat Board Act, it is clear that the farmers, the western producers of wheat and barley, must decide their own future. If we really put in place, as suggested by the motion of the member for Malpeque, a democratic process enabling people to vote and recognizing the result of that vote, democracy will prevail.

However, that is not at all what the government is doing in this case. As I said, I have no issue with the fact that the Conservatives, in their election platform, in their election promises, in their way of doing things—in certain cases—say that they want freedom of choice, that they want to offer this or that to farm producers. So be it.

● (1120)

However, there is a way of going about things. At present, in the case of the Canadian Wheat Board, democracy is being denied.

Furthermore, this denial of democracy will continue because a large number of farm producers will be excluded from voting if there is a plebiscite. We know that the minister announced that there would be a plebiscite or referendum for barley producers, who do not represent the majority of producers in the west; wheat producers are in the majority. We do not yet know why wheat producers will not have the right to a plebiscite. However, one thing is certain—a number of farm producers will be excluded from the vote, according to the government. They are lining up their ducks to ensure, or at least attempt to ensure, that they take the vote. I find that this government's way of doing things is absolutely unacceptable.

On December 5, the president of the Canadian Wheat Board, Mr. Measner, held a press conference to denounce the Conservative government's position on the Wheat Board's future. Earlier, I said that Mr. Measner was the CEO, but he is the president. He maintains, and rightly so, that the government should hold consultations on the future of the Canadian Wheat Board as soon as possible. That is why we are discussing this issue today.

In fact, the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food has passed a motion introduced by the member for Malpeque, calling for a plebiscite on this issue and demanding that producers themselves determine the future of the Canadian Wheat Board, their collective marketing tool. That is what we are discussing today in this House.

Mr. Measner says that he has to defend the interests of producers over those of the government, and that is his job. He could also lose that job because he is doing it well. That is what is happening. He said, "I find it quite ironic that I have been asked to pledge support for the government's policy of marketing choice, which is not the law. In other words, if I continue to obey the law, I will be fired".

*Routine Proceedings*

For its part, the government is maintaining that all government appointees are expected to go along with the government's position. If the approach to this issue is not tantamount to dictatorship, then I do not know what is.

The majority of members of the CWB's board of directors, who are elected by producers, want to keep the single desk model set out in the Canadian Wheat Board Act. Moreover, on Sunday, four out of five board members were elected. They are in favour of maintaining the Canadian Wheat Board as is. I think that the message to the Conservatives is clear.

In previous discussions in committee and in the House, it was said that the Conservatives were doing what they pleased, that they should not flout section 47.1 of the Canadian Wheat Board Act and that they should not ignore the opinion of producers. To that, the Conservatives replied that, on January 23, they had been given a mandate that entitled them to do what they were doing.

Imagine, Mr. Speaker, according to the Conservatives, everyone who voted for them on January 23, was in favour of later dismantling the Canadian Wheat Board, when we know that people choose to vote one way or another for a number of reasons. You, yourself, are an MP, Mr. Speaker. I believe that in your own riding—and you have been there for some time—people surely have voted for you in one election and not in another for their own reasons because a party promised something that, in their work or family life, was very important.

In my opinion, we have to look at a party's entire platform and not just one topic, in order to say that since people elected us it is entirely acceptable to act a certain way because it was their choice. Well, wait just a minute. We are talking about the Canadian Wheat Board here and wheat producers. I do not think that all these people voted for the Conservatives. And even if they did, they voted for a government. This was not a plebiscite, like we would have on a specific issue. There is a difference between voting in an election and voting in a referendum on a very specific issue.

I do not think it is correct to say that we can do whatever we want because people voted for us in the last election. I could do the same. I too was democratically elected on January 23 and in 2004. In my riding, I am not about to say that I can do whatever I want or whatever I think because the people have spoken and that is the end of it.

• (1125)

I still have to go meet people, talk to them and discuss things with them—as I do every weekend—to get a feel for what the population wants. I know my region well and I have to represent what the majority of people in my region want. That makes perfect sense, and the government should do the same.

Bloc Québécois members have no desire to endanger a collective marketing tool used by 85,000 wheat and barley producers in the west. I talked earlier about comparing them to Quebec producers. We were also accused of knowing nothing about this because we are from Quebec. Earlier, I heard people tell folks from Prince Edward Island and Ontario to leave them alone. I am sorry, but as the NDP member said just now during questions and comments, I get

hundreds and hundreds of letters from western producers asking me not to forget about them.

Obviously, I do not represent people from the west. As my party's agriculture critic, I think I have a responsibility—as do all members of this House—for all of the issues that come before us. If we do not take a stand, or if we do not pay attention to all of the issues that come up, how can we look in the mirror every morning and tell ourselves we are doing our jobs and accomplishing the work for which we are being paid?

Like Quebec producers, I—as agriculture critic and defender of the interests of Quebec agricultural producers—fear that the Conservative government will go after another one of Canada's very important collective marketing tools: supply management. We know that 40% of Quebec's agricultural economy depends on supply management. I am talking about dairy, egg—for eating and for hatching—poultry and turkey producers.

So, these people are very concerned about what is happening at the moment. We know exactly why the other countries criticize us during WTO negotiations. They are critical of these two collective marketing tools, which are not, however, subsidies. We in the Bloc Québécois even invited the ambassadors of various countries to come here in order to explain to them just what supply management means. Increasingly, people understand and are interested in what is happening in Quebec and elsewhere in Canada where supply management is used.

Despite all that, during negotiations, these two tools are always blamed for all the ills. They are tools that countries wanting to take over our markets would like to see destroyed. If the Conservative government approved or arranged the dismantling of the Canadian Wheat Board, other countries would be delighted and would want to know about the state of supply management. This is why this matter is of such concern to us.

Let us consider the comments by the minister, who told us in committee that, no matter what happens, if there is an agreement at the WTO, the government will have to sign it. It is the “no matter what happens” that sets off an alarm bell for me. I tell myself that, if we have to make concessions on supply management, the government will simply dismantle it and thus throw the entire farm economy in Quebec into disarray.

We can certainly not allow such a message to go out. When the minister says this in committee, his remarks are public and heard by people throughout the world following the proceedings of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food. We are in the age of globalization, with the Internet and so on. With such technology, people are well aware of what goes on, of what the minister and members are saying, and we must weigh our words carefully when we say that Canada will sign an agreement in the end, regardless.

*Routine Proceedings*

Furthermore, the Director-General of the World Trade Organization, Pascal Lamy, said that concessions will have to be made sooner or later by both the Canadian Wheat Board and the supply management system, because that is what other countries are demanding.

I am sorry, but we were elected and we are here to defend our gains, especially when it is entirely reasonable to do so. As I said, there is no government subsidy, at least, none concerning supply management. As for market access, perhaps we could begin discussing that once the other countries are on a level playing field with us. In fact, the average Canadian market access for other imported products is approximately 5%, while in other countries, average market access is 2.5%

Once these individuals from the United States, Europe and elsewhere achieve the levels we have reached here, perhaps then we can begin discussing or looking at what we can do.

• (1130)

For now, I think our market is open enough that we can maintain the system as it is.

Of course, there is the attitude taken by Canada's chief negotiator at the WTO, which is why the Bloc Québécois moved a very important motion before this House, to ensure that no concessions would be made concerning supply management during these negotiations. The negotiator himself said that his hands were tied. Personally, I think that is very good news. Indeed, farm groups thank me every time I meet them. The Bloc Québécois and every member of this House all deserve their thanks, since the motion was passed unanimously.

I receive expressions of thanks from all over, whether from New Brunswick, where I recently met with farmers, or from Ontario, or from a woman farmer in Calgary. I point this out because, of course I receive thanks from Quebec, but I would like to emphasize just how important it was to farmers everywhere that we unanimously passed here in this House the motion to protect supply management. This must be recognized.

Collective marketing is very important in Quebec. As I mentioned, we have supply management, joint plans and cooperatives. All of this serves to protect farmers' income. Farmers have an absolute right to organize the marketing of their products, and that includes organizing to join forces to obtain the fairest possible market. That is what western producers did. They decided, all together, that they would put in place a marketing tool known as the Canadian Wheat Board.

As I already stated in a previous speech, I do not believe that we should say that is the way it is and nothing should ever change. However, there is a way of making changes and that should be with the agreement of the producers themselves. It is up to them to decide.

That is also what the members of the Fédération des producteurs de cultures commerciales du Québec did. One of the few times that the minister was angry with me was when I spoke about the Canadian Wheat Board. I imagine that he was quite irritated that someone from Quebec talked about this issue. The minister wondered what we would say if that were imposed in Quebec. There is no need to do so because the Fédération des producteurs de

cultures commerciales du Québec decided to set up a collective marketing board. Granted it is not the Canadian Wheat Board, but it is nonetheless a marketing tool. If people want to sell their grain for human consumption, they must belong to the board. That also goes for milk producers.

I have been told I am comparing apples and oranges. Not at all. A Conservative member told me that if he wanted to produce milk, he would. Careful, it does not work that way. First, one has to be a member of the Fédération des producteurs de lait du Québec, which is a collective marketing system since it is all part of supply management. A producer has no choice but to comply. He has to buy quota and follow those rules as well. It is all a collective. No one can just do what they want. We cannot take our milk and go sell it in New Brunswick, the United States or something like that. Not at all. Someone comes to collect the milk that has been produced. The producer has a quota, which has to be respected, but at least the producer is sure to have a stable income. The consumers will be assured of stable pricing. These are the advantages, or some of the advantages, of supply management.

As I was saying, last year, these cash crop producers created the Agence de vente du blé de consommation humaine in Quebec. This new agency ensures that the Fédération is the only agent authorized to market wheat for human consumption in Quebec. It was inspired by what is already happening in other types of farming in Quebec, whether it be with milk, maple syrup, pork, beef, etc. It is through a democratic process that such sales agencies come to be. Producers are called on to vote on their creations. That is how we do things in Quebec.

The same is true when one decides no longer to participate. It is also up to the producers to decide on ending these sales agencies. Contrary to the Canadian Wheat Board, the Fédération des producteurs de cultures commerciales du Québec does not own the production and has no tie to the government. That is the difference.

Quebec has also expressed support for the Canadian Wheat Board. We have only to think of the testimony by the Union des producteurs agricoles du Québec before the committee. UPA representatives came to tell us that a comparison could be drawn between supply management and the Canadian Wheat Board. When I was the first to raise this possibility or this concern in certain English-Canadian media, I was described as some sort of hothead and accused of mixing apples and oranges. It is funny, though, that since then, many stakeholders, such as the UPA, have told the committee that this is indeed a danger.

• (1135)

Saskatchewan's Minister of Agriculture and Food told the committee that and wrote to me to say that I was right. Manitoba's Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives also made the same assertion before the committee.

I applaud what they are doing in Manitoba. They are going to hold a plebiscite on the Canadian Wheat Board.



*Routine Proceedings*

I think that the Conservative federal government should take note of what is being done elsewhere and take a democratic approach. With a plebiscite, people could choose and decide what they want to do. The government should hold a plebiscite of all wheat and barley producers in western Canada.

**Hon. Raymond Simard (Saint Boniface, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his comments. He had a lot to say about supply management.

Members may remember that yesterday, during question period, I asked the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board if supply management is next on the hit list. The clear response was that, first, we did not know what we were talking about, and second, the Conservative government has no intention of trying to dismantle supply management.

They said that we did not know what we were doing, but last night, I had the opportunity to meet two people who are very familiar with the sector, Laurent Pellerin, whom we know well, and Bob Friesen, the president of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture. These two men are very well respected in the sector we are discussing today. They are very concerned about the Conservative government's next moves. They are concerned because if the government decides to attack the Canadian Wheat Board—which is working extremely well, has been working well for 70 years, is respected internationally and brings in hundreds of millions of dollars more for farmers—what is to stop it from attacking the entire supply management system next?

I am sure that Quebeckers are interested because we depend heavily on agriculture. My colleague was wondering why we should trust the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, who says that there is nothing to worry about; there is no problem; the government will not attack supply management; it is focusing solely on the Canadian Wheat Board.

Why should we believe the minister when he says that?

**Mr. André Bellavance:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his judicious comments.

When he refers to Mr. Pellerin, he is quite right. When I first talked about the concern expressed in Quebec regarding the actions being taken by the Conservative government against the Canadian Wheat Board, obviously, the leaders of the Union des producteurs agricoles were the first who came to see me and tell me they were worried about what was going on in western Canada at the time. That is why we have spoken out vigorously, in the parliamentary committee together with the member for Malpeque, an NDP member and, in fact, the entire opposition, to start making this government understand the enormous importance of the message they are sending on the international scene.

That is why I just said—and I want to emphasize this for the hon. member—that when the minister says in committee that in any event, no matter what happens, the government is going to sign an agreement at the World Trade Organization, we think: fortunately, the other countries have not signed an agreement. This is unfortunate for the developing countries, because the current Doha round is meant for them. So we are reduced to hoping that the negotiations will fail each time, because we are afraid that our own government

will be dropping its most important tools for collective marketing: the Canadian Wheat Board and supply management.

I agree with the member, but I do not have his answer, because it is up to the minister to answer. What is being done at present to the Canadian Wheat Board—why would the minister not do it with supply management?

International pressure has always been heavy, at least since we have had supply management and the Canadian Wheat Board. Canada has always been asked, in negotiations, to drop its two collective marketing methods.

As the member said, if we are going to undermine the Canadian Wheat Board, and ultimately try to dismantle it, in the next stage, the pressure is going to be aimed solely at the supply management system. We therefore have good reason to worry. We are entitled to wonder about this and to be very worried, and we would be irresponsible not to do so, as opposition members, because we have to worry about what will happen to supply management next.

• (1140)

[*English*]

**Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the member for Richmond—Arthabaska said in his remarks that even though he is from the province of Quebec he has a responsibility to examine the issue regardless of where he is from. I want to congratulate him on withstanding the attack that we get consistently from government members, which is that because we do not happen to be within the prairie region, then obviously we should not be speaking on the issue. I think that is unfair on the part of those members, and I think it is because they do not have evidence to defeat our argument, so they can only attack us personally. That seems to be the Conservative way.

I want to expand on the question of supply management, which my colleague asked the member about, because supply management is certainly one of the strong industries in Canada, whether it is in dairy, turkeys or eggs. Supply management is huge in the province of Quebec, where the member comes from. He mentioned in his initial remarks that the key as it relates to the Wheat Board relative to supply management is that the government is moving to prevent collective marketing.

I think my hon. colleague asked if we can believe the minister. I do not think we can. We cannot believe the government. We know how honest the Conservatives were on income trusts; they said they would not do anything, but they did. We know that on the Canadian Wheat Board issue the member mentioned the hundreds of letters that he is getting, as I am, from Conservatives who are saying they never thought the Conservatives would do this. They thought they might make some changes but not set up a structure that would destroy the board.

*Routine Proceedings*

What would the impact of this be on primary producers in his province in regard to what is truly the government's next step? The ideology of the Prime Minister is to go to the open market. That is what he is doing here. He does not care what producers say. He has not allowed them their democratic rights. He has put gag orders on the board, firing the CEO. What does the member for Richmond—Arthabaska think the impact will be on farmers in his province when the Prime Minister gets to his next step, which is—

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order. The member finally got to a question.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. André Bellavance:** Mr. Speaker, in my opinion, by referring to ideology he has hit it on the head. This government has an ideology. At the beginning of my remarks, I said that nothing about the Canadian Wheat Board file was off the cuff. The ultimate goal is to obtain the result the government wants and talks about openly. I believe that it is not hiding anything. What it wants is a free market for everything, in all fields, on all issues. It wants the least intervention possible.

I once heard the Minister of Industry in this House, refusing to defend the bicycle industry, right in his own riding of Beauce, where there was a bicycle manufacturing plant. They are washing their hands of it. They want to let the free market do its work. If you cannot keep up, if you are not competitive, it is because you are not good and you should not be doing what you are doing.

They refuse to intervene in any way to protect our markets. Yet, we have the right to do that in accordance with the laws of the World Trade Organization. That is the ideology of our government. So, it is not complicated. The impact on a province like Quebec and for a riding like mine where there are so many dairy producers is that the agricultural economy of Quebec would be run into the ground. It would be finished.

When I say that 40% of the Quebec agricultural economy is supply managed, I think that I have answered the question.

It is strange because the people who have the same ideology as the Conservative government, the Montreal Economic Institute, which is where the Conservative Minister of Industry comes from, often tell us that from time to time they conduct studies that show supply management does not make sense; that we should put an end to that practice and that we should open our markets to everyone.

They quote the example of what has happened in Australia. I am sorry, but what has happened in Australia in terms of dairy production has meant that, first, there are many fewer dairy producers than there used to be because they no longer have supply management. Moreover, because of the opening of markets, those dairy producers are making a lot less money than they used to. It must also be said that large processors have now taken the place of small family farms. That is not what we want in Quebec.

• (1145)

[*English*]

**Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Malpeque for making this debate possible. These are difficult times

for farmers, not only in the west but throughout Canada. This calls for rational thought and a spirit of cooperation.

For example, the threat to fire Adrian Measner, a proven CEO of the Canadian Wheat Board, because he happens to disagree with the Conservative government's platform, is wrong. It is equally wrong to stack the Canadian Wheat Board's board of directors with two new appointees, one who was fired from the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool and the other who has demonstrated an open hostility to the very idea of a Canadian Wheat Board or to any kind of government assistance to farmers.

We have seen the results of the Canadian Wheat Board elections. Farmers have spoken. Four out of five directors are strongly supportive of a single desk Canadian Wheat Board, with only 20% voting against it. Interestingly enough, the largest margin of victory for Canadian Wheat Board supporters came in the district overlapping the riding of the Parliamentary Secretary (for the Canadian Wheat Board) to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board.

In District 1, Art MacKlen, a strong Wheat Board supporter, lost his seat by only 205 votes. There has been some suggestion that this may have happened because of the minister's interference in the elections; approximately one-half of farmers found themselves out of this election. In fact, the gentleman who was successful in District 1, Mr. Henry Vos, was himself not happy with this government interference.

As Mr. Ken Ritter, an elected director for District 4 and chair of the Wheat Board stated in his letter to the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food last week, "Since the [Canadian Wheat Board] last appeared before the committee in the month of June 2006, the relationship between the federal government and the CWB has unfortunately not improved".

This is due to a number of reasons: first, a July 27 meeting to which the CWB was not invited; second, an unbalanced and anti-Wheat Board task force; third, the minister's order in council restricting the Wheat Board's right to openly communicate with the farmers in the way it sees fit; fourth, changing the director election process in mid-stream; and fifth and most recently, the intention of the minister to fire Adrian Measner.

As Mr. Ritter states in his letter, "there must be a better way". Why can the minister not meet with the board of directors and have an open and frank discussion on the board's future? The Canadian Wheat Board is not some kind of stagnant, top heavy bureaucratic monster, as some critics would have us believe. It is willing, in Mr. Ritter's words, "to grow and stretch and accommodate farmers who want more flexibility".

*Routine Proceedings*

For example, at a recent meeting the directors looked at changes that would actually allow small processors to purchase wheat and barley, for human consumption or export, directly from farmers. They also looked at the CWB's policy toward farmer-owned new generation cooperatives that are involved in value-added processing.

The Wheat Board, as we know, also offers a wide variety of producer payment options. Over 17,600 farmers are availing themselves of the opportunity to price their grain themselves through options such as the fixed price and basis payment contract. For this crop year, according to Mr. Ritter, the CWB is putting in place a pilot program called the delivery exchange contract, which would enable participating farmers to match delivery opportunity with their own individual business needs.

The point Mr. Ritter makes in his letter is that change should be a gradual process. These types of changes build on the strength of the Canadian Wheat Board without putting the organization at risk and, most important of all, appear seamless to customers so that the Canadian Wheat Board can be counted upon to continue the high level of service to which they have become accustomed. In effect, Mr. Ritter is calling for an evolution, not a revolution.

[*Translation*]

All we need to do is take a look at history in general to see that, in many cases, revolutions make life harder and sometimes completely unbearable. Our farmers have been through enough of the difficulties caused by the market and our competitors' subsidies, especially the United States and the European Union. Up to now the economic effects of such a change have not really been studied or analyzed. However, it is more or less agreed that the Canadian Wheat Board, as we know it, will cease to exist if the single desk is taken away.

● (1150)

Let us take Murray Fulton's report, for example. What are his conclusions? Here are a few of them.

First of all it will be extremely hard, if not impossible, for the Canadian Wheat Board to survive without a single desk mandate, and it will disappear in the end.

Grain handling and transportation will be comparable in Canada and the United States. But in the United States there is the U.S. Farm Bill, which shelters farmers from market forces. Our farmers, however, would be vulnerable on an open market.

The changes would also be irreversible. It would not be possible to have a free market and later decide or ask to restore the Canadian Wheat Board.

The government often talks about this new Canadian Wheat Board II, which will continue to exist.

Let us recall the facts though. The new Canadian Wheat Board will not automatically have access to the technical resources and personnel of the current CWB. It will be impossible to find the quantities of grain necessary without a grain-handling system. Independent farmers will thus be at the mercy of the grain companies in place. Furthermore marketing power will be transferred to the grain and railway companies. So the farmers will lose their political clout.

If there is no more Canadian Wheat Board, the rail rates will increase. At present the Canadian Wheat Board negotiates the best conditions with the railway companies, but they are not likely to be granted to farmers, and this will give rise to higher transportation costs for Canadian farmers.

[*English*]

Any changes to the present system must be well thought out and based on valid studies that deal with the economic impact on farmers and to Canada, and not political ideology. It is imperative that this takes place before any changes to the Canadian Wheat Board single desk marketing system be made.

As was pointed out earlier, we are in a very competitive international environment. It is no secret, and I and my party have said this before, that our competitors would like to see an end to the Canadian Wheat Board, just as they would like to see an end to supply management.

Underlying this debate, however, is a question that we often do not talk about, and that is of individual rights or the rights of the minority. The question is, should a small group of farmers have the right to bypass the Canadian Wheat Board and sell their wheat and barley on the open market? Knowing that this signifies a possible end of single desk marketing in Canada or the Canadian Wheat Board as we know it, or agriculture as we know it, does this group of farmers have the right to jeopardize the collective system put in place to sell grain on the world market, which the majority of farmers agree to? In my opinion and the opinion of my party, we believe that they do not.

It is easy to go to market choice, which most agree will see an end to the Canadian Wheat Board as we know it. This is why we need good, valid research to look at the effects of such an approach. In other words, to look at a long term vision. Will our farmers be able to compete on the world stage with prices, transportation and markets controlled by the major multinational grain companies, or will they be thrown to the wolves, so to speak, completely at the mercy of the major world players, with no one to stand up for them as they try to negotiate fair prices?

These are thoughts coming from someone who has thought about this, not some kind of left-wing radical talking against the multinational corporations. These are valid questions that I think all of us need to answer. That is why we need a gradual evolution that involves close cooperation between government and the farm-based Canadian Wheat Board.

Mr. Ritter and his board of directors have indicated a willingness to work with the minister to come up with a workable plan. Once this plan is formulated and shows the Canadian Wheat Board's vision for the future, farmers should then have a say. This is what we need, not another revolution.

*Routine Proceedings*

With the time left, I would like to quote a bit from a letter that was written to the chairman of our agriculture committee by Mr. Ritter. It states:

At the CWB, we have followed the committee's work with great interest. Unfortunately, some of the information that has been placed before the committee has been less than accurate. The CWB would therefore respectfully submit the following for the record.

1. The president of the Western Canadian Wheat Growers' Association (WCWGA), Ms. Cheryl Jolly-Nagel, indicated in her testimony that the CWB is not offering farmers the opportunity to capture the rally in wheat prices that is currently lending strength to markets. This is not the case. Opponents of the single desk like Ms. Jolly-Nagel often like to compare spot prices in the U.S. in a rising market with pooled values in western Canada. They raise this issue far less often when markets are falling and pooled values are above spot values...If opponents of the CWB's single desk compared the price of select winter wheat with appropriate protein levels to U.S. values, they would see that the two are close, especially when prices available under the CWB's Producer-Payment Options (PPOs) are used...it would follow that farmers would be using the Producer-Direct Sales (PDS) process to access those values.

• (1155)

[*Translation*]

Another point was raised. The witness stated in her presentation:

We consider it unjust that farmers in Ontario are free to sell their wheat and barley to whomever they please, including the export market, whereas any western Canadian farmer who attempts to engage in the same activity is considered a criminal and sent to jail.

This statement is wrong in two respects.

First, prairie grain growers are not discriminated against. They have as much right as Ontario farmers to decide how to market their grain. The Ontario wheat growers chose a free market through the elected members of their board. This decision was not made by the government. Western Canadian farmers, on the other hand, have always elected a majority of single desk supporters to represent them on the board. We saw that just a few days ago. In addition, the wheat producers in Quebec have decided to sell their milling wheat through a single desk system. Prairie grain growers would not be discriminated against unless they were unilaterally denied this right by the federal government.

Second, grain growers who want to sell their product themselves can do so through the direct sales process. This enables them to take advantage of all the premiums available in comparison with the prices that the Canadian Wheat Board could get on similar markets.

[*English*]

It was also claimed that the Wheat Board deprives western Canadian farmers of the opportunity to take full advantage of their skills as good marketers. This is a statement that is quite hard to defend in light of the growing popularity and extensive use of the Wheat Board's PPOs, 3.5 million tonnes committed to the program so far. Grain producers in western Canada now have the opportunity to lock in prices for their crops based on U.S. commodity prices.

The Western Canada Growers' Association often points out that a record number of wheat acres were planted in Ontario in 2006 and then makes the inference that the elimination of the Wheat Board single desk would somehow reverse the trend toward less wheat acres in western Canada.

A farmer's planting intentions are actually determined by a whole host of factors, including: soil conditions, the price of inputs, the

price of alternative crops, and management considerations like crop rotation and availability of storage.

It should also be noted that, while it is true that the average wheat acreage in western Canada has decreased 18% from what it was 10 years ago, American farmers who have another system, who do not have a wheat board, have reduced the number of acres they seed to wheat by 21% over the same time period.

Other submissions attempt to blame the CWB for a total lack of investments in value-added infrastructure. Yet in summary, malting capacity in western Canada has tripled since 1985 and 75% of domestic malting capacity is now found in western Canada.

It is clear from the documents provided by the Wheat Board that the Canadian Wheat Board does not impede value-added processing and that it has actually supported real growth in both barley and wheat sectors at rates which compare very favourably to what is happening in neighbouring jurisdictions.

I have read some of the statistics and I have seen that our malting capacity is actually increasing, as is pointed out here, and that our malting capacity is not suffering. There are other reasons why a plant may want to locate in the United States and it has nothing to do with the fact that we have a Canadian Wheat Board.

• (1200)

[*Translation*]

Witnesses were asked how often oats and canola growers had been the subject of trade complaints from the United States. They claimed that crops not under a single desk system are safe from trade actions. This is definitely not the case, as the pork and beef industries know very well. The lack of complaints about crops like oats and canola has nothing to do with how they are marketed. The real reason is that these crops are not grown very much in the United States and there are no special interest groups pressing Washington to block Canadian imports.

An organic farmer from Saskatchewan complained about various aspects of the producer direct sales process. He said, for example, that he received a bill for having filled a direct sales order that was three times as much as what he had been told initially. The bill that he had received was an interim bill. Although the bill did not mention it, there were still interim payments and the final adjustment to consider.

[*English*]

As we move on and we look at these reasons and counter-arguments presented by qualified professional people in the Canadian Wheat Board, we can see that maybe we are moving too quickly. Maybe we have to stop, think and sit down with the democratically elected board of directors and go over some of these points.

*Routine Proceedings*

We mentioned studies by the George Morris Centre, by Sparks and by Drs. Carter and Loyns, which were invoked by the House of Commons. We can see that the growth in the wheat processing industry as compared to expansions in oilseed processing. The former is a mature industry with several long established players. Therefore, it is not valid to compare it to the oilseeds sector.

The growth in value added processing in western Canada is said to be lagging behind expansion in other parts of the country or in the U. S., when the opposite is true. They say that the CWB is accused of distorting the domestic prices, when in reality prices to domestic mills are directly linked to U.S. milling prices. There is a failure to recognize that domestic mills, most of which are located in proximity to the U.S.-Canada border, are free to get their wheat from U.S. origins if the CWB wheat prices are too high.

The letter by Mr. Ritter states:

In summary, the findings of all three Alberta-backed studies lack credibility. As a result, their conclusion that the CWB does not provide Prairie farmers with added returns must be questioned. The existence of CWB premiums—a conclusion which both the KFT and grain studies reached—is, on the other hand, corroborated by a very unlikely source, namely the United States International Trade Commission (ITC). In its 2001 investigation into the CWB's behaviour in the marketplace, the U. S. ITC found that Canadian durum prices were higher than American prices in 59 of the 60 months that were examined.

Once again I would like to take the opportunity to thank the member for Malpeque for making this debate possible. It is a critical time in the history of farming in Canada. We have yet to form a long range agricultural policy. I know all parties are working on this right now.

In the meantime, I caution that we must proceed with caution. We should not throw something out that has been around for over 60 years because apparently there is an immediate market gain. What if there is a market gain today and tomorrow there is not? As the Fulton study report showed, this is irreversible.

● (1205)

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much for allowing me to speak on this very important matter.

[*English*]

**Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to the member. I understand where he is coming from. What I do not understand is does he really know the results of what would happen if barley were taken out of the Wheat Board.

I believe that happened either in 1991 or 1992. Barley moved to an intercontinental open market. Access to information, of which I have copies, showed that the farmers never saw a better year in their years of farming than they did during that period of time. Access to information showed that the Wheat Board had increased its sales a great deal as well.

It appears to me that a little competition kind of spurred the Wheat Board on to maybe do a bigger and better than what it had been doing, and it was quite successful.

We have heard the member say that unless something is proven, we should never move in that direction. Does he not feel that the period of time in the early 1990s, when we had an open continental

market on barley, showed there was a working formula there? It was a great year for all the farmers in my riding who simply wanted to have the freedom of choice.

**Mr. Alex Atamanenko:** Mr. Speaker, I emphasize once again that we need to have indepth studies. What happened in 1991 may not be the same situation today, but maybe it is. We need to have indepth economic consultations and studies before we embark on this road. It may be very true that my hon. colleague is right, but it also may be true that he is wrong. Before embarking on this road, we need to be very certain.

**Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, given the fact that producers would have to compete with multinational corporations, which now control the sector, how does he see the single desk being a marketing tool in empowering farmers?

Also, given that we have a highly trained workforce providing market intelligence at the Canadian Wheat Board situated in the city of Winnipeg, many of whom live in our communities, what impact will the demise of the Wheat Board have? It will certainly impact farmers and their ability to market internationally. Another issue that has not been addressed is the impact it will have on the city of Winnipeg, which many of us fear will have a significant impact.

**Mr. Alex Atamanenko:** Mr. Speaker, from what I have read, specifically the Fulton report, it seems that if we go to dual marketing and the Canadian Wheat Board II, there will be a lot of uncertainty. One of the things that will happen is the large multinational companies will syphon off expertise because people will be uncertain of their futures. They may get offers from Cargill or some other company, which means they probably will move if the companies are not based in Winnipeg.

In the end result, my point is it is not logical to assume that the Wheat Board will function as it is. Many people will move and seek other jobs. Some may stay. It is not logical to assume that farmers will invest in a new Wheat Board because of the uncertainty in the future. The fact that there would be another corporation, a farmer controlled organization on the international scene, in other words, the Wheat Board, working on behalf of farmers, offers some stability.

It all seems to point to a lot of uncertainty. One of the points in the Fulton report is that prices will go up for farmers for transportation.

● (1210)

**Hon. Carol Skelton (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have a comment and then a question for the hon. member.

The member noted he had been doing a lot of reading. I read a blog titled "Small Dead Animals" and I ask him to look at it. There is a comment in the blog about the Canadian Wheat Board by Larry Weber from Weber Commodities in Saskatoon. He is a noted marketing authority. I would like my colleague to have a look at that website and read the comments. After he does, I would be interested in hearing back from him.

*Routine Proceedings*

How many farmer producers of wheat and barley are in his riding?

**Mr. Alex Atamanenko:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her suggestion to read the blog.

The impression I get from her question is the fact that because I live in B.C.'s southern interior, which has an apple industry, cattle ranching, some vegetable production and grain farming, I am somehow not qualified to speak on behalf of farmers.

The point is, and this was brought up before, I happen to be in touch with farmers. I am receiving hundreds of letters from Saskatchewan and Manitoba. I have been talking with representatives of the National Farmers Union and other farmers, and I am here on their behalf. What I say is not a lot of my personal views. It is a reflection of what the majority of farmers are saying in western Canada.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Would the member opposite tell us how many wheat and barley producers are in the riding of the Minister of Agriculture? I believe there are none.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer):** I do not think we can use points of order to ask other people questions other than the person giving the speech.

The hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas.

**Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his intervention in this important debate today. I, too, support the Canadian Wheat Board.

However, as an urban MP, not many people in my riding have very much experience with this issue. Our experience might be limited to driving by the grain elevators around Vancouver Harbour or watching a train with grain cars, delivering grain to that facility. I also know that many people in my riding understand the adage that farmers feed cities. They want to be supportive of agricultural producers in Canada.

I know this has a really important meaning for the supply management system in Canada, but it also has implications for food security in Canada, and people in my riding understand that. However, they also want to see justice for farmers.

Could the member speak briefly, so urban Canadians can understand, on why the Canadian Wheat Board is as important to them as it is to the people who live in the rural parts of Canada?

**Mr. Alex Atamanenko:** Mr. Speaker, what is interesting is often we do not bring in the urban community when we talk about this. It is as if the issue is isolated, that it only concerns rural communities. However, we are talking about food security and about the ability of farmers to continue to survive.

I was at a meeting of the National Farmers Union a week and a half ago. One of the presentations dealt with the energy crisis and agriculture.

It is very possible that soon, maybe not in our lifetime, there will not be enough energy to continue the transportation of food all over the continent, that we will have to be more localized, that we will have to revitalize our small communities not with mega-farms but

with small family farms and that people will go from the cities back to the small communities to produce food in order to feed the cities.

When we look at the Canadian Wheat Board and the possible destruction of it because of pressure from the multinational grain companies, the European Union, Australia and the United States that want us to dismantle it so there is more competition, we have to look at this as one way, one step to ensure food security for our nation.

• (1215)

**Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Battlefords—Lloydminster.

I am a little flabbergasted after hearing some of the comments and speeches this morning. When I first came to this country from the United States in the late 1960s, one of the first conversations I got in on with agriculture producers was with regard to how they market their grain and the Wheat Board. Where I came from as a farmer I used to load up my truck with grain and I would market my own grain and enjoyed doing it very much. It was instant cash. I had choices of marketing it in a number of places. My father and my brother, who were also in the farming business, and I managed to do that on a regular basis.

I was rather surprised when I came to this country that it was not how wheat and barley were marketed, and I began to pay a little more attention to what was going on. I thought it was rather strange. This is always a contentious point with a lot of members in the House.

From my experience as a farmer, when I go out and plant the seed, nurture the crop, pray for rain, hope the hail does not come, sweat, worry about being able to grow a good crop, then come harvest time, it is looking really well, so I am in a hurry to get it harvested and I want to get it into my granary bins. Then suddenly it is not mine. I no longer own it. It is as simple as that. I do not have the right to take that grain out of the bin in which I put it and decide to sell it in whatever fashion that I want and try to get the best price that I can for it. It now is the property of someone else with no guarantees of exactly what is going to transpire and no guarantee of price.

I used to get fluctuating prices when I was marketing my own product, but it seemed that we had a set thing where we were concentrating on getting an average at best, not the top dollar but a good average across the board where all these things could be levelled out.

After I decided to get into politics, I started attending a lot of meetings with various organizations, the barley growers associations and other groups of farmers throughout the riding. It became quite obvious to me very early on that following the open continental barley market that we had in the early 1990s where there was so much success for a great number of farmers and good success for the Wheat Board at the same time, that we did not continue down that path because it was really going well. I could not understand why they would want to bring an end to it until somebody pointed out to me that it was illegal for them to do that according to the Canadian Wheat Board Act and that it had to be changed back.

*Routine Proceedings*

It is obvious now, after seeing the Liberal government in power for 13 years that it was changed back because that is exactly what the Liberals wanted to see happen. It was after the Liberals were elected in 1993 that the change returned to where barley was back in the Wheat Board with the concession that feed barley would not be, but the top grade malting barley would be under the Wheat Board.

During some of those years, I remember when Mr. Vanclief was the minister of agriculture and I remember when Bob Speller was the minister of agriculture. They spent a couple of days travelling in my riding and spoke at many farmers' meetings. Because I was there, I know exactly the message they got over and over again from the farmers in Wild Rose, where I happen to know there are several hundreds, if not thousands of farmers.

• (1220)

The farmers said loud and clear over and over, with the exception of two or three that I heard, hundreds testified to the minister and to the travelling committee that they wanted choice. Over and over again I hear in this House, particularly from the Liberal Party critic, that the majority of the farmers do not want that. I do not know what majority he is talking about, but in 13 years I have had ample opportunity to keep track of what my farmers in Wild Rose are saying and it is always 80% to 85% of farmers, who are mostly barley growers, who raise a good chunk of the great crop in my riding, they want choice. They consider it to be a matter of freedom.

That should attract attention on the other side of the House because I have heard lots of debates on freedom and protecting minority rights, that under the charter this should be allowed. It puzzles me why we would have the same group of people who would talk out of one side of their mouth in regard to the marriage law that we debated last week, and out of the other side of their mouth say that the farmers should not have that right to a choice, that freedom. That absolutely makes no sense to me. This is Canada. This is where we have freedom. This is where farmers do an excellent job of growing their crops. They put up with the sweat and toil. They want the choice of selling their product, but they do not have that freedom.

Regarding the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the lack of giving that freedom to the barley farmers, because specifically that is what is grown in my riding and the majority of the crop that deals with the Wheat Board is barley, I wonder how they feel. In all aspects of society we continually push and push for the rights and freedoms of certain individual minority groups, but we do not do the same thing for all the farmers who go to the trouble of working hard to try to raise a good crop and make a decent living for themselves and their families.

If the farmers feel they could do that, I certainly believe they ought to have the opportunity. I know no one of that group who would want to dismantle or get rid of the Wheat Board. They simply think that it ought to be part of a marketing choice. Since when has it become a bad thing in Canada to allow choice for a farmer to do what he thinks he can do best with his own product? I am really puzzled by that. Besides, if it is such a good thing, why are the farmers from Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Ontario not all lining up to sign up for the Canadian Wheat Board? After all, it is not the western Wheat Board, it is the Canadian Wheat Board.

The Liberals continue to talk out of two sides of their mouths when it comes to that issue. Freedom; they have a right. I remember debating child pornography, but we could not do anything about it because people have the right to artistic merit and they have to be able to express themselves. We could not get anywhere with that issue. Then it had to be the public good and we could not get anywhere with that because they have the freedom and the right to do that.

Tell me, how can it possibly be that a few farmers who grow barley and who would like to have marketing choice do not have the freedom and the right in Canada? They do not have it in Canada because members of the party sitting across the way were in charge and they would never allow that to happen, but I could never understand why.

• (1225)

I also had the opportunity to talk to several members from the Toronto region who confessed loudly that they did not have the vaguest idea of what the Canadian Wheat Board was all about. They did not even know what the issue was about. I talked to them personally. Yet they would stand and vote against giving these farmers freedom. One would think that they would be interested in knowing that what they were doing was voting against a producer who works hard to grow his own crop, the 85% of the people in my riding who want the choice, saying no in a dictatorial fashion, "You will do with your product as we say". That is just not right. It is just not right.

**Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to the comments of the member for Wild Rose. I respect the member very much, but the key question is whether farmers should collectively be able to have the freedom of choice to decide on their marketing institutions and its authorities. That is what we are talking about, the freedom of choice to decide collectively and abide by those rules.

I would correct the member on one point. His interpretation of what happened on the open continental barley market is certainly different from mine. The studies have proven that the open market did not return to the producers the same amount as it would have if they went through the board.

Is the member for Wild Rose suggesting that in Canada we should not allow marketing through institutions or marketing boards collectively? Is that what he is saying, that we should not allow marketing through institutions or marketing boards collectively, that farmers should not have that choice?

**Mr. Myron Thompson:** Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like the member to maybe dig into access to information and get the real facts of what happened in the open continental barley market.

Second, whenever a group of farmers, and it is the group as a whole, wishes to have a method of marketing their product, I do not think anyone objects to that.

*Routine Proceedings*

What I am saying is that the people in my riding who farm, who grow barley, want to have choice. It is not the 1940s and 1950s any more. Many of them have gone to university or college and have taken some courses in marketing. They would like to be able to exercise that. Farming is different now than it was back in those years. They would like to be able to extend their ability to work with the job they have of growing food for our nation into marketing and into value added.

They just want to have the freedom and the choice to do that. There is no way that any board should be allowed, authorized, or whatever the case might be, to prevent that from happening. There is no doubt about it that if the entire farming association in my riding wanted to use the board, I would be the first one to say that we have to defend the board, but that is not the case.

This is Canada. We have a Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and they are saying that under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, they should have the freedom to market their goods.

**Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his vigorous intervention on behalf of farmers in his province and riding.

I was a little astonished. Over the last hour and a half, we have had an opportunity to hear from a member from the Liberal Party, a member from the Bloc and a member from the NDP. The member from the Liberal Party represents Prince Edward Island, which of course does not have a wheat board. The member for Richmond—Arthabaska is from Quebec, which does not have a wheat board. The other member is from the B.C. southern interior, which does not have a wheat board.

I am just wondering what the member's response would be to members of Parliament representing jurisdictions that do not have a wheat board telling Alberta farmers and those farmers in his riding how they should conduct their business.

• (1230)

**Mr. Myron Thompson:** Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question. I indicated in my speech that people who are MPs from the Liberal Party who live in Toronto do not have a wheat board either. The members of Parliament who come from Montreal do not have a wheat board. The city members from Edmonton do not have a wheat board either.

The point is that those areas where they are obligated by law to market their goods, as they are told, through the Canadian Wheat Board live in the Prairies, in the rural areas. There are some who would like to have the choice. It just sounds so easy to me, that living in Canada that should be made possible.

The member from the NDP talked about how there should be extensive studies and whatnot. I do not disagree with that, but the Liberals threw all of that open continental barley market back into the Wheat Board and there have never been any studies on it since then. It is just automatic, and that is the way it is going to be whether they like it or not. That attitude needs to change.

**Mr. Gerry Ritz (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to join in this discussion on what actually started out as a concurrence motion on a report from the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food that I chair.

The member for Malpeque wanted to somehow send a message to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board as to what should be on the ballot question in the upcoming plebiscite on barley. He had quite a convoluted message to deliver. That is certainly his right as a member of Parliament, whether he sits in the Wheat Board area or not, and I have heard this argument here as well.

The member for Malpeque has a history within the region that we serve with his leadership of the National Farmers Union some years ago. He was very effective in throwing wheat at Prime Minister Trudeau when Trudeau asked why he should sell farmers' wheat. The member has since joined that party and is basically asking why he should not control the marketing of farmers' wheat? He is now on the side that he used to oppose. I think he was more effective when he was opposing this issue than he is now as a rubber stamp for the former Liberal government's agenda.

I stood here this morning during the opening of this place with you, Mr. Speaker. We say a little prayer here every day and it talks about how great it is to live in Canada where we enjoy freedom and opportunity. I thought that was quite apropos when I knew this concurrence vote and motion were coming forward today.

This discussion is about the lack of freedom and the lack of opportunity given to some western Canadian farmers. Some farmers agree with this single desk idea and we saw that reverberate through western Canada in the vote that was just held to elect five directors to the 10 member board. We saw that reinforced by a 51% turnout and a portion of those voted against. What we have is a two-third and one-third situation. Minority rights are being trampled on here.

The opposition party claims to be the party of the charter. Those members claim to be all about minority rights and all about this and all about that. When the rubber hits the road, they seem to throw that ideology aside or bend it and twist it, and shape it to fit the issue of the day.

Farmers in western Canada do not only vote for directors. They also vote on the type of product they will grow and market on their own. Some people enjoy growing canola and pulse crops because they are cash crops. These folks defend the board to their last breath. They do not have time to market their wheat and barley so someone else has to do it for them.

The member before me made a good case for the continental barley market that was selling more barley at a better price in the two months that it existed before the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool took the government to court. One of the cooperatives that the member opposite talked about so glowingly has since hit the brink of bankruptcy because it no longer represented the wants and aspirations of the farmer delegates that it supported. That cooperative is now crawling back from the brink and is one of the proponents of market choice. Imagine that. It had an epiphany on the way to the poorhouse and has come back saying this is what farmers want. It has redesigned itself and reoffered itself as a power of choice, as a power of doing things differently in western Canada.



*Routine Proceedings*

The member for Malpeque spoke about the dire consequences of what would happen. He said the multinationals were going to take over. I have heard that statement flown for years. It has not happened. The multinationals, the Cargills, the Louis Dreyfus' and the Bunges, happen to like the Wheat Board very much. The Wheat Board is a monopoly buyer, so these multinationals now have a single desk to go to. They know the quality is there because farmers in western Canada are the best at producing a quality product. They know the quantity will always be there in certain areas of the Wheat Board. They only have to shop at the Wheat Board desk in Winnipeg. They do not have to go anywhere else. They basically get their job done for them.

The Wheat Board does have an accumulation system, if we want to call it that. It is a great system across western Canada for the bulk commodities that it handles because farmers are growing less of those commodities. It is probably over-designed at this point.

• (1235)

The market share of the board has been sliding. As it ramps up to hang on to the single desk and spend a lot of its money on communications and spin, it is losing farmers' support. We are seeing that in the types of crops that are grown.

I know that certainly in my own farming operation the folks who farmed around me, when I was actively farming before this crazy job, were growing less and less wheat, durum and barley. They grew it as a rotational crop, Mr. Speaker, and you know in your own riding how it is grown. One very seldom sees wheat, durum or barley grown on a summer fallow situation. That also is because of the multi-cropping that is being done and the advent of different farming practices.

The one farming practice that has never changed over the last 60 or 70 years is the marketing opportunities. We have seen products come and go. We have seen crops come and go under the board, but the basic facet, the single desk, even with the changes that have been made in offering price contracts and futures buying and so on, is that we still have to make use of that single desk. Very few farmers are taking that up and the Wheat Board will spin that it is a new program, it is not known, and farmers are not sure how to access it and how to make it work.

The farmers that I talk to are very much keen marketers. They tell me it is administratively heavy, bureaucratically obtuse, and the administration of it is extremely expensive. They just do not bother with it. They just do not bother growing those commodities, but do grow the canolas, the pulse crops, and everything else because they know they can make money at it and they can make the marketing choices when they need to.

I have a real concern. We are coming up to the time of year when the moratorium on clawbacks is about to lift at the end of this calendar year. The Wheat Board, as the vehicle for the cash advance on wheat, durum and barley, has been offering what in my neighbourhood has been averaging way less than \$1, in some cases less than 50¢ a bushel on feed barley, but farmers are forced to sell their feed barley, which is of great quantity and quality this year, back through the board because they took the cash advance from the board.

They have to deliver product to pay off the cash advance. They cannot sell barley as feed barley outside the board, take the \$3.50 a bushel they can get now for it and pay off their cash advance. They have to deliver the barley to the board. That is costing them in most cases \$3 a bushel right off the top.

It is also going to cost them by the fact that 50¢ a bushel will not pay back their \$2 a bushel cash advance and, therefore, they will be facing interest and penalties, penalties to the tune of 10% of their cash advance, which could be as much as \$10,000, and then interest dated the day they took the cash advance out, not the day they were forced into not adhering to it. So, I have some major concerns with that.

It was great when all the parties agreed to changes to the AMPA legislation that extended those cash advances to other commodities and ramped them up for the grain commodities, but we did not do anything on the punitive side. That is going to come home to bite all members of the House of Commons when our phones start ringing in January. Farmers will be saying they are now being forced into bankruptcy because they were forced to sell their products cheaply, could not address their cash advances which were going to keep them away from the cash advance coming up this year and now the banks are not going to look at them. We have a real avalanche effect coming up in the next couple of weeks.

That speaks to the intransigence and lack of change and flexibility that we have seen on the board. Sure there are 10 elected officials but 5 are appointed and there is also a little thing called the Canadian Wheat Board Act.

I happened to bring a copy of that with me today. There are a lot of different things in it that the members opposite and the folks in the media like to use against the minister but one has to read the act. With the changes that the minister of the day made in 1998, the member for Wascana, he actually made the minister of the Wheat Board God in that he controls everything.

The members on the board, whether they are elected or appointed, have what is called a duty to comply. That is what got our friend, the president, Mr. Measner, and some of his acolytes in trouble. They forgot to read that part of it. They started to think that they could somehow go way out in left field and do their own thing outside of the mandate of the board.

Nowhere in the mandate of the board does it say, "Spend farmers' money to promote yourself". It is not in here. The so-called gag order that the minister delivered to them said: "Please check out section so and so that says your duty to comply does not allow this third party standing in lobbying for your own self-interest".

The members opposite spin that in a whole different way, but the reality is the Canadian Wheat Board Act is very succinct. It is a very short document and certainly spells out what can and cannot be done. I wish the members opposite would read it.

*Routine Proceedings*

●(1240)

**Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has raised the charter issue and its potential relationship to the Wheat Board. If he believes that in fact this is a charter issue and that farmers ought to be able to defend themselves through the charter against the Wheat Board, does he not agree that we should bring back the court challenges program to enable farmers to actually pay for their right to defend themselves under the charter? If in fact he believes it is important to defend the rights of farmers and other minorities, would he urge his government to reinstate and fund the court challenges program, which would give them that facility?

**Mr. Gerry Ritz:** Mr. Speaker, the unfortunate part of the court challenges program was that people had to hire some Liberal lawyer in order to make it work. The member opposite knows that specious arguments at best were going through the court challenges program. I certainly stand in defence of cutting it. It was not working in the best interests of Canadians at all, but being perverted for its own use by the party opposite.

It is interesting that the member brings up court challenges. The Wheat Board has faced 11 or so, if I have not lost count. The member for Malpeque can correct me if I am wrong, but 11 different challenges under the WTO, the NAFTA and so on. We have won all of those. The unfortunate part is that it has cost tens of millions of dollars to western Canadian farmers. The money comes out of the pooling accounts of the Wheat Board to fight those challenges through the courts of the day.

The only reason why we are facing those challenges is because we are always accused of dumping. That is a catch-all. It has certainly been used as an anti-tariff trade barrier. In reality, those challenges do have merit in that we are still stuck in western Canada alone under the Wheat Board using the KVD, kernel visual distinguishability grading system.

The Wheat Board buys grain from a producer, or some would say steals it, and it sends it to the United States as No. 3 feed. It gets down to the United States with the kernel visual distinguishability and that is a wrinkled kernel. It is then regraded by the Americans through their technology and they say they do not care what it looks like. They grind it up and call it No. 1 milling flour. Canada is charged then for dumping because we have sent in a feed, when in reality it was top grade milling. My farmers lose that value.

**Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I suggest to the member who just spoke that he tell the women of Canada his views on the court challenges program. It was the court challenges program that provided many opportunities and made many legal breakthroughs for women from coast to coast to coast. I think it is important that women know that party's views.

We have heard a lot from the other side about human rights. We have heard a lot from the other side about choice. We have heard a lot about fair practice and the opportunity to be heard.

I wonder how the members opposite view the processes employed by their government as it relates to choice and human rights, whether it is a gag order, whether it is a selective task force, whether it is selective meetings, or whether it is firing people who disagree with them.

To my mind this is not what a democratic country is all about. To my mind this is a case study that students across the country will view as a “what not to do in government” as time passes.

●(1245)

**Mr. Gerry Ritz:** Mr. Speaker, if that is not the pot calling the kettle black, I do not know what is. The member should check out all the work that has been done on ad scam if she wants to see a court case in what not to do. She should check out the costing of her gun registry to see what not to do in public policy.

It is interesting that the member talks about jobs and safeguarding jobs. I heard from other members opposite. The member from Thunder Bay is concerned about his port. At the same time he is condemning the Wheat Board for not loading the salties or ocean going ships right at Thunder Bay. Instead, my farmers are forced to pay for the whole system up through the Great Lakes and the canals, then offloading in Montreal and loading back on to the salties.

At the same time, we have the member who just spoke saying all these jobs in Winnipeg will be lost. I have read reports where the 400 staffers at the Wheat Board do not do any more or better job in volume, quantity and quality, than the five people who do the marketing for Cargill. Why should I and my friends and neighbours as western farmers be forced to support this whole antiquated industry across this country? We cannot do it.

**Hon. Raymond Simard (Saint Boniface, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre.

I am pleased to say that I am from Manitoba, and for the people who are concerned that people from outside the Prairies should not be able to comment on this kind of issue—

**An hon. member:** It's a national issue.

**Mr. Raymond Simard:** It is a national issue and it has been probably one of most debated issues in the House this fall. As a matter of fact, it was on the front page of the *National Post*, which is unusual for a western issue.

If I am not mistaken, this is the third debate that we have had on the Wheat Board. Obviously the Conservatives did not listen to us in the first two. We are hoping that this time they will get the message.

The Conservatives continue to move ahead with this ridiculous proposal despite the fact that all the opposition parties are totally against this, which is actually quite unusual. It does not often happen that all three are against something. We are listening to our people out there. The Conservatives say they are listening to their people, but we are listening to ours as well.

*Routine Proceedings*

The Conservatives continue to move forward despite the fact that farmers continue to vote in favour of the Wheat Board. The farmers continue to support this institution, but that does not seem to bother the Conservatives at all.

They continue to move forward despite the claim of the premier of Manitoba that “destroying the Wheat Board would have a major economic impact on Manitoba”. The Wheat Board has a downtown location and several employees. I will leave that to my colleague from Winnipeg South Centre to discuss as well.

They continue to move forward despite the fact that the mayor of Churchill has said to stop the insanity, that it would close down his town and every town along the railroad line. Again, we know how important the Port of Churchill in northern Manitoba is becoming with global warming, in which the government does not believe in the first place.

The Conservatives continue to move forward despite the fact that the provinces of Manitoba and Saskatchewan are so frustrated with the anti-democratic process that they are holding their own plebiscites. It is absolutely unheard of for these provinces to hold their own plebiscites; that is how much they trust this Conservative government. They figured they could not count on this government to do the right thing, so they will be doing it.

I can understand why they would feel such frustration. There was a meeting in Saskatoon at one point, an anti-Wheat Board meeting, to which Manitoba and Saskatchewan were invited, but they were asked to sit in the corner and were told not to comment on any issues. I can see why these provinces are now taking the lead on this and making sure that farmers are represented, at least at one level.

The Conservatives tried to muzzle the Wheat Board CEO and now are trying to fire the CEO, which is absolutely ridiculous. He is one of the most respected CEOs in the country. When I look back at how people are trying to defend the Wheat Board, what I think is that they are exactly the kind of people I would like running this corporation. I think they are doing exactly the right thing. They are trying to display the other side of this issue and are doing it very successfully.

The Prime Minister and the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food have to admit that this whole process has been a total disaster, and now we have last weekend's election, in which four out of five members of the board of directors who were elected are pro-single desk. I think it is another confirmation that the Conservatives should be changing their idea on this very important issue. It is becoming a major problem for the government. I think it is realizing that its policy is flawed and is not supported by farmers.

I almost sympathize with the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, but I did say “almost”. I can see the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food receiving his mandate letter from the Prime Minister, which would say that he has one basic objective: dismantle the Wheat Board. That is what he has to do.

Let us think about it for a second. What else has the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food done? He has focused uniquely, through every anti-democratic process he can think of, on dismantling the Wheat Board. I am not sure exactly where the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food stands on this. Internally, he may be thinking that it is absolutely nuts, that he is going against every

institution, against the farmers and against the House of Commons. Hopefully the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food does not believe internally that this is the right thing to do.

When does this stop? When does the government reverse its position on this? It is important to note that the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food is getting absolutely no support from his Conservative colleagues in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. I can tell members that it is very difficult right now to get some of those people to stand up and speak either for or against the Wheat Board. It is absolutely incredible that people who are elected by 80,000 or 90,000 people do not have the guts to get up and speak on behalf of or against the Wheat Board. For God's sake, these members should get it on the record so that in the next election the voters can judge them on it.

● (1250)

We even have rural Conservative members of Parliament in Manitoba who have householders out uniquely on agriculture, but with not a word on the Wheat Board. Can members imagine that? It is one of the most discussed topics in the House of Commons this fall and for them it is as if it does not exist. It is absolutely ridiculous.

Let us try to get these people on the record. Members of the media have told us that they have called some of those members of Parliament nine or ten times, with absolutely no success. The only person who stood up and who has the courage of his convictions is the member for Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette. I believe he has been ostracized for his efforts. We really appreciate the fact that he has listened to his constituents. He has come through. He is doing the right thing.

I think of the senior minister in Manitoba, who, once again, has said absolutely nothing on the Wheat Board. He is supposed to be there to defend the interest of Manitobans, of Winnipeggers and actually of Canadians, but there is not a word from the minister. He is the regional minister in Manitoba. He has a responsibility to stand up for what is important for Manitobans, but there is not a word from this person.

I will leave the economic impact of this issue to my colleague as well.

Why are our Conservative colleagues from Manitoba not up in arms over this? It is very simple: they are muzzled. On every major issue that we have had over the last 10 months, the members of Parliament, elected by 80,000 to 90,000 people, are not able to speak their piece. I think that is a sad commentary in a very strong democracy such as Canada's.

[*Translation*]

I would also like to comment on the supply management issue. I come from an urban constituency, and when the people across the aisle say that people who do not live in the Prairies should not comment on this subject, I find that absolutely ridiculous.

*Routine Proceedings*

My riding is Saint-Boniface, and it is right downtown. I get calls and e-mails from people who are very concerned, people in the country and people in the city. As the NDP member said earlier, this issue concerns people in cities just as much as people in rural areas. People in the cities all have friends or family who live in rural areas. We have great respect for them and we do not want to destroy the institution that serves them so well.

This week, a voter in the riding of Portage-la-Prairie, a rural riding in Manitoba, wrote to me: "The loss [of the CWB] would be an economic setback, a failure of global vision regarding trade and a social disaster in our rural areas". He closed by saying: "I do not want [thePrime Minister ] to sell the farm to Bush".

I think there are very serious concerns in rural areas and I am disappointed that people in the Conservative Party are not listening to them. People have to call us in downtown Winnipeg. We see how stressed these people are.

Like my colleague in the Bloc Québécois, I want to talk about supply management. We have to think that this is coming. I know the Conservatives tell us there is no danger and they will not touch supply management. When I asked the question yesterday in the House, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food replied that there was no cause for concern about the Canadian Wheat Board, everything would be fine, there would be votes and it would be done democratically. We have seen the results so far.

The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food also told us yesterday that we did not understand anything about supply management. I can tell you that yesterday I had an opportunity, with a few colleagues, to meet with Mr. Pellerin, the president of the Union des producteurs agricoles, and with Mr. Friesen, the president of the CFA. These people are very well respected in agriculture. I think that even members of the Conservative Party will admit that they are people we should listen to. These people are deeply concerned about what is happening. It is being said that if the Conservatives are able to tear down and dismantle an institution like the Canadian Wheat Board, which works extremely well, why would they stop there? Why would the next step, in fact, not be supply management?

So people are worried. It is not me saying it, it is experts in the field.

• (1255)

[*English*]

It really bothers me that all this is being done without any proof about dismantling the Wheat Board. It is really interesting, as one of my NDP colleagues was saying, that there is absolutely no proof, no evidence, that dismantling the Wheat Board would be favourable to the farmers, and yet the government is moving ahead with it.

The new government, as it likes to call itself, always brags that its members are defenders of democracy, transparency and accountability. On the Wheat Board file alone, there have been so many transgressions that they are discredited on all three counts.

What are the government members afraid of? If they think offering choice is a solution, let them put it to a vote. Let them test the market. Let the producers decide, and not with a manipulated list of voters, not by splitting the vote by crop and not by trying—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer):** Order, please. I apologize to the hon. member, but we are out of time for his speech. The hon. member for Yukon.

**Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.):** First, Mr. Speaker, the member for Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette did speak for his constituents but had the government vote against his bill to protect hunting and fishing in rural areas. Does the member for Saint Boniface think that was some sort of retribution?

Second, why are Conservative members in the west not answering journalists' phone calls about the Wheat Board? Has the member heard that they are hiding from journalists?

Third, does the member see a change in the party from when it was the Reform and then the Alliance, which used to represent constituents? Now, for those who are not in barley, and I am just talking about those farmers who have predominantly wheat, the majority of whom are for the Wheat Board, those members are not speaking for their constituents. Their leader says they should have leadership but should not speak for their constituents.

**Hon. Raymond Simard:** Mr. Speaker, those are very interesting questions.

On the first point, I believe there is no doubt that the whole muzzling factor is quite obvious. We have seen the Prime Minister do it when it comes to the media. We have seen it with his people here in the House. Members of the media have told us that they have been calling some of those members 9, 10 or 12 times to get at least a comment on the Wheat Board, but they get absolutely nothing. They do not even get called back, or else those members say they cannot comment.

It seems to me that if there is anything that is anti-democratic, that is it. We are elected as members of Parliament by 80,000 or 90,000 people to stand up for our ridings and our constituents. If we disagree with our leader, we should be able to express it in the House.

Although my Conservative colleagues from Manitoba tell me they are getting absolutely no calls or emails from their constituents in rural Manitoba, I cannot believe that for a second if I am getting them in downtown Winnipeg. I am convinced. There is something wrong with that. Obviously their constituents are concerned and those members should be speaking on their behalf.

Lastly, I agree with the member. It is not the Joe Clark Conservative Party. It is not the Leo Duguay Conservative Party. I was speaking to friends this weekend who are members of the Conservative Party. They agree with me that this one is a totally different party. It is a right wing, neo-conservative party. Otherwise, it would have let farmers decide their own destiny.

*Routine Proceedings*

•(1300)

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, in my region of Timmins—James Bay we do have grain farmers. The grain farmers in Ontario made the decision to go to dual marketing. They made that decision because the tonnages are much smaller and most of the grain farms in southern Ontario are very close to the market. It was a very different set-up.

However, the decision was made by the farmers. It was a very clear decision. We did not have Premier Dalton McGuinty threatening to fire the head of the Ontario wheat board. We did not have him gagging the farmers. We did not have the government holding meetings and kicking people out so that only a certain viewpoint could be heard. The farmers made their own decision.

What I find confusing here is the attitude from the government members that they do not feel they actually could win a fair vote, so they are doing everything they can to put the squeeze on a farmer-run organization. As New Democrats, we have always supported the belief that if farmers want to choose a form of marketing system that works for them, farmers have a right to do that.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague a two-part question. First, why does the government have to resort to such tactics to pull this off?

Second, if the Conservatives are serious in going after this ideological drive for their concept of an open market, what does that mean for the dairy farmers? They do not have open markets. They have to go through the supply management board. What does it mean for our poultry industry? What does it mean for our egg industry?

Does the member expect that the Conservatives are going to use the same heavy-handed tactics against the supply management system they are currently employing against the Wheat Board?

**Hon. Raymond Simard:** Mr. Speaker, my colleague brings up two very good questions. First I would like to thank him for confirming that Mr. McGuinty is a very democratic person. I think it is important that we note that.

In terms of why the Conservatives have to resort to these tactics, I think it is very obvious. I stated in my presentation that they do not have a leg to stand on in that the farmers are against them. The Liberal position from day one has been to let the farmers decide. We have always said that the government should let us have a free and clear vote without manipulating the lists and without trying to fire or putting pressure on the CEO. Let us have one vote with everybody involved. We will respect that decision as long as the question is clear. But the government could not work that out. I appreciate the comment. Obviously the government is resorting to these tactics because doing it the legal way or the right way would not work.

Second, on dairy and poultry farmers, again I totally agree. It is a huge issue. I met some people last night who are immensely concerned. I can tell the member that Quebec farmers are watching this very closely right now. They are saying that if these Conservatives can tear apart a democratically elected board of directors and dismantle this institution, why would they not attack them next?

**Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the member for Battlefords—Lloydminster indicated what the government is all about. It is opening the door to U.S. companies to come into Canada. What it could not do 11 different times on the U.S. grain trade, which is to find the Canadian Wheat Board guilty, it is now trying to open the door and trade 460 jobs in downtown Winnipeg for 5 at Cargill. That is the nub of the whole debate today.

We have heard much conversation about the fact that nobody on the other side, bar one, is speaking up for the Canadian Wheat Board. They are critical of those who come from other parts of the country for daring to speak out on behalf of the Wheat Board. However, what is important to get on the record is the economic impact this will have on the province of Manitoba and the city of Winnipeg.

As I said before, the government is quite prepared to trade 460 jobs in downtown Winnipeg for 5 jobs at Cargill Grain. Over 2,200 jobs in Manitoba and in Winnipeg are directly dependent on spinoffs from or direct jobs at the Canadian Wheat Board. We are talking about more than \$66 million in wages and salaries and over \$3 million that goes to the local government. The government would rather have Cargill reap the profits and Archer Daniels come in and take over these jobs.

The impact on Manitoba and Winnipeg is devastating. As I indicated, the gross provincial income impact is \$86 billion. Despite the obvious impacts the Canadian Wheat Board has on the city of Winnipeg, as my colleague has said, there has not been one word of dissent, bar one, from Conservative members across the way. Why are they not standing up? Why are they not looking at the economic impact on the city of Winnipeg, on the province of Manitoba and on the Port of Churchill? Downtown Winnipeg is challenged as is and they are ready to move in and gut it.

It is as though if they repeat their reality over and over again it will be true. The minister says that dual marketing will have no impact. Countless studies and a court case have shown that should dual marketing come into play, it would be the end of the Wheat Board. However, the government believes that if it repeats it, it will have no impact.

•(1305)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer):** It is my duty to interrupt the proceedings at this time and put forthwith the question on the motion now before the House.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer):** All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

**Some hon. members:** Yea.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer):** All those opposed will please say nay.

**Some hon. members:** Nay.

*Routine Proceedings*

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer):** In my opinion the nays have it.

*And five or more members having risen:*

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer):** Call in the members.

*And the bells having rung:*

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer):** The vote stands deferred until after question period today.

\* \* \*

**PETITIONS****MARRIAGE**

**Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is my honour today to present a petition under Standing Order 36 signed by 121 people from all across Canada.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to do all that is necessary to preserve marriage as a union of one man and one woman.

[*Translation*]

**SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE**

**Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to thank my colleague from Chicoutimi—Le Fjord for this petition from the Maison d'accueil pour sans-abri de Chicoutimi inc. This home is truly afraid that the government will not renew the SCPI program and that it is on the verge of losing front line people.

This program is mostly for less fortunate individuals and responds to real needs. The program serves a number of people within various agencies and generates a number of direct jobs within this community. These direct jobs will be lost, as will the help for the homeless, if this SCPI program is not renewed.

[*English*]

**VOLUNTEERISM**

**Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from 1,500 Canadians from every province across the country.

The petitioners state that tens of thousands of young Canadians every year are denied an opportunity to serve in an organized volunteer capacity at home and abroad.

The NGOs are out there and waiting and the youth are there. The petitioners call upon Parliament to legislate or take other measures to enable all our Canadian youth at home to volunteer at home and abroad for these types of volunteer community activities.

• (1310)

**MUSEUMS**

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present a petition in the House containing hundreds of names from the good people of Malagash, Pictou, Wallace, Shelburne and Halifax, Nova Scotia.

They have brought forward a petition concerning museums. They point out that museums generate over \$17 billion annually to Canada's gross domestic product; that over 59 million Canadians visit museums every year from coast to coast to coast; that our

museums have a positive social and cultural impact on virtually every community in this country; that the museums assistance program is recognized as the most crucial element of the federal support for Canadian museums; that the funding for the museums assistance program today is virtually at the same level as it was in 1972, when I was in grade 4; that the Conservative Party of Canada, which is now leading the minority Parliament in Ottawa, pledged in writing during the most recent election campaign that "generous funding for Canada's museums would be a priority for a Conservative government"; and that on September 25, 2006, the Conservative minority government announced that it cut \$4.6 million from the museums assistance program.

Therefore, they are petitioning Parliament to immediately reverse the funding cut that was announced on September 25 and live up to the commitments made by all parties in the last election to increase funding for museums at the next opportunity and to do so as soon as possible.

**CANADA POST**

**Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have a petition with 240 signatures from the residents of the town of Caledon, Ontario, who are terribly upset with Canada Post and who want the government to ensure that traditional rural mail delivery continues for the town of Caledon.

**AGRICULTURE**

**Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to present a petition from concerned constituents in my riding to ban terminator technology. This technology is designed to render seeds sterile in harvest and thus prevent farmers from saving and replanting seeds.

Therefore, the petitioners request Parliament to enshrine in legislation a permanent national ban on terminator technologies to ensure that these are never planted, field tested, patented or commercialized in Canada.

**ANIMAL CRUELTY**

**Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have another petition to present with regard to animal cruelty stating that Bill S-213 will not meet the needs of Canada's animals and, unlike its predecessor known as Bill C-50, will do little to prevent further abuses.

Therefore, the petitioners call upon the government to veto Bill S-213 and, instead, enact legislation similar to Bill C-50 which would safeguard animals and hopefully lead to less violence.

**HOMELESSNESS**

**Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the last petition deals with a subject that has become increasingly important across Canada, certainly in my riding, about homelessness and the fact that homelessness and mental issues are not being addressed.

*Government Orders***GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

[English]

The petitioners respectfully request that the House take such actions as are necessary to immediately address the issues of homelessness, mental health and affordable housing.

## EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

**Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I present several petitions today with respect to the Employment Insurance Act.

The first petition deals with the 28, unanimously agreed upon, recommendations that came from the all party committee to restore financial governance and acceptability to the Employment Insurance Act. The petition contains hundreds of signatures of citizens from across the northwest area of British Columbia.

## REGIONAL ZONING

**Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I also have a more specific set of petitions dealing with the actual zoning that HRDC designates across this country. Our region, which represents, by HRDC's standards, half of the province, has a huge diversity and spectrum of employment needs. The petitioners demand that the government finally take a common sense approach to splitting the region in a more justifiable way.

## VOLUNTEERISM

**Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as it is close to the holiday season, I would like to take this opportunity to wish you and all my colleagues in the House all the best of the season, Happy Hanukkah and a Merry Christmas.

I am proud to present a petition on behalf of 264 young Canadians from my riding. The petitioners would like the assurance that young Canadians from across the country will be able to volunteer in communities at the national or international level if they so choose. Our youth are our future. They gain a lot of social skills and ability from volunteering.

It gives me great pleasure to present this petition to the House.

\* \* \*

● (1315)

**QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER**

**Mr. Russ Hiebert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

**The Speaker:** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

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**REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY DEBATE**

## SPEAKER'S RULING—CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

**The Speaker:** Yesterday, during routine proceedings, the hon. member for Malpeque requested an emergency debate on the subject of the Canadian Wheat Board. I have decided that his request does not meet the exigencies of the Standing Order at this time and, accordingly, there will not be an emergency debate at this time on that subject.

**PREBUDGET CONSULTATIONS**

**Hon. Bev Oda (for the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Democratic Reform)** moved:

That this House take note of the Eighth Report of the Standing Committee on Finance, presented to the House on Thursday, December 7, 2006.

**Ms. Diane Ablonczy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleagues for their enthusiastic encouragement as I begin to tell the public a little about the report of the finance committee.

The report contains the recommendations of the finance committee to the government about what should be in the upcoming spring budget, budget 2007. In order to make these recommendations, the finance committee heard over 400 witnesses. There were many hours of consultations with different groups, some individuals and organizations. They had input and some thoughts about what they would like to see in the next budget.

The theme of the budget was “Enhancing Canada's competitiveness and productivity”.

I will say a couple of word about the theme of our consultations, competitiveness and productivity. In a way, regular Canadians do not lay awake at night wondering about Canada's competitiveness and productivity. They are busy trying to figure out how they are going to pay their mortgages or their rents. They are thinking about their jobs and family matters. Therefore, I want to remind everyone that Canada is part of a global economy. No longer does trade, commerce and all the economic activities of any country happen in isolation.

It used to be that countries would trade maybe a little with their neighbours and to a small extent with the far flung corners of the world. Increasingly now Canada's economy is interwoven with that of all other countries on the globe, which has huge impacts for Canada, huge repercussions and huge opportunity.

Canada has some unique advantages in the global economy. It also has some challenges. These are the things the finance committee looked as to how Canada could maximize the returns to our advantage and how we could deal with the challenges.

The word “productivity” is used sometimes. What it means is being able to maintain our standard of living and the quality of life. We have built this over the years by hard work, by businesses investing, growing and becoming more able to succeed in the global marketplace and to take advantage of opportunities in and with other countries. All of that gives Canadians a high standard of living, one that is envied in the world. It also gives a quality of life, which is I would say second to none in the entire world.

We have values and qualities in our way of life that are not only desirable, but that are worth protecting and fighting for by continuing to have strategies so we can have this for many years in the future, not only for ourselves but for our children and our grandchildren.

*Government Orders*

If we are to shine, if we are to be at the top end of competitiveness on the global scene and if we are to maintain our quality of life with all of its facets, whether it is our social programs, our level of income, or the goods and services we want and need, it takes some planning.

These advantages do not happen by accident. It takes planning, hard work, good decision making and some capable and smart financing and budgeting by governments, not just the federal government but the provincial, territorial governments and municipal governments as well. The activities of government can have an impact on a country's standard of living and its quality of life. If wrong decisions are made about levels of taxation, spending and preservation of programs and services, then the standard of living and the quality of life is impacted.

● (1320)

Our government, and I believe all members of the House, take that duty to Canadians extremely seriously, not just for today but for the future. Leaders are paid to look ahead, to see the challenges and opportunities and to make the decisions today that will ensure we succeed tomorrow. That was some of the framework around our consultations.

We had many submissions by different groups. It was interesting because some groups said that the government should spend more here and not there. Others had different kinds of spending. Some people said that we were spending far too fast. They said that the level of spending of governments was outpacing the ability of our economy to grow and fund that spending. They said that we needed to be more modest, more reasonable in the growth of spending by government and that we needed to take the burden of taxes away from our job creators.

A lot of times some members of Parliament talk about business or big corporations. Big businesses, big corporations and big banks are simply those that have succeeded and they are our job creators. These companies or institutions have publicly traded shares and they are owned by individual Canadians. They are owned by pension plans of unions and professional organizations and public pension plans such as the Canada pension plan, the RCMP pension plan and the armed services pension plan.

Successful businesses not only create jobs for Canadians, but they create secure futures for Canadians. Their growth, income, profit and wealth are shared among the shareholders, which include many retired Canadians.

We want to ensure that the job and wealth creators of our society are successful as well. That means we have to give incentives, particularly because wealth can move anywhere in the world. We cannot force it to stay within our borders. Wealth and investment capital will go where there are opportunities for growth and profit, and we have to be cognizant of that. We have to ensure that the decisions we make in our budgets, federally, provincially and municipally, reflect those realities. If we make it too tough for job and wealth creation, then those opportunities will go elsewhere. We want them here in Canada.

These are some of the things we want to balance. We need to balance strong, stable, effective social programs as well, including

health care and education. We need to ensure that our infrastructure is conducive to activities of Canadians to succeed in their businesses and professional lives and for those who run businesses to be successful as well. We need to have the capital to fund our social programs, which are so important to us.

These are the things with which we wrestle, both in the finance committee, in our report, and also in the government, in the Minister of Finance and his officials in crafting budgets.

Budget 2007 is coming up quickly. It has been very interesting to hear from people and to come to grips with some of the issues to be thought about and some of the decisions to be made.

Not surprisingly, there are some differences of opinion among committee members. Some differences are on ideological grounds. There is the ideology of what we would call sometimes the left, which calls for more government spending and intervention. Then other members of Parliament, many of them Conservatives, believe the government should enable others to succeed, but the nanny state is not the best way to go. These are legitimate differences of opinion and call for some interesting and helpful debate.

● (1325)

Some recommendations in the committee report were pretty much endorsed and agreed to by everyone. There were a lot more where opposition members out voted the government members, as this is a minority Parliament. The three opposition parties voted together and government members did not agree with some of them. That is how democracy and a minority Parliament works.

Because there were some areas of disagreement, the different parties put in supplementary reports to clarify areas where they did not agree with the main report or they wanted to add some items that did not make it into the main committee report. The supplementary opinions are appended to the committee report and make for interesting reading. I would encourage Canadians to look at these documents on the Internet. Sometimes these short opinions, because they can only be about four pages in length, contain a great deal of condensed thought.

I want to spend a few minutes advising Canadians and the House about some of the principles the government members of the finance committee felt were important.

Conservatives believe that government should restrain the growth in spending to a more sustainable level. The GDP is growing by 2% to 3% a year, but government spending skyrocketed to 8% per year on average. Last year it was 15%.



*Government Orders*

No householder or business in the world could only have an increase in income of 3% or 4%, but spend 8% to 15% more every year. That just does not compute. It is not sound financing or reasonable spending. Conservatives believe the rate of government spending should increase on services for Canadians, but at a reasonable, moderate and prudent level, which is followed by all Canadians, whether they be individuals or businesses. Therefore, spending is pretty much in line with the increase in income and not above it. Once people spend above that, they get into trouble. That is just not good financing. This is one of the principles that led government members to disagree with some of the opposition recommendations in the report.

Conservatives believe that recommendations have to be affordable and realistic. Sometimes spending money on things sounds good, but if we look at the bang for the buck, whether there is a benefit for the cost to Canadians, who trust us to spend their money wisely, and it does not justify it, according to the analysis the government believes is a reasonable one, then we cannot support it.

Conservatives believe the tax burden for individual Canadian businesses should be reduced. We did that in our first budget, a couple of months after we were elected. The budget provided \$26 billion in tax reductions for Canadians and businesses over two years. We believe Canadians, business people, entrepreneurs and investors can spend money more wisely sometimes than governments and bureaucrats can.

That is a shocking concept to some in the House, but we believe it to be so. We believe that the wealth creators in our country are individuals and businesses, particularly small business. We want to give them more of their own money, earnings and wealth to do with as they see fit.

● (1330)

We also believe there should be value for money. We hear politicians sometimes saying that we gave this much to this program or organization, as if somehow just putting money out got results. We all know from real life that just spending money does not necessarily give good value. Sometimes we can buy a product that does not do what we thought it would do, that is not high quality, or that does not afford the comfort or the service that we thought it would. These matters have to be looked at carefully and reasonably to make sure that when we spend Canadians' money, they actually get real value for it, that it is not just bragging rights for politicians but it actually delivers some measurable and proper benefit for the Canadian public.

We noted, for example, that all the other opposition parties say that they oppose another cut to the GST, but we know that the GST cut is the only tax cut that can be given to a multitude of Canadians who otherwise do not pay taxes. This is the only tax they pay and they deserve a tax reduction as well.

The Retail Council of Canada said that the GST reduction did more than twice as much for Canadians' real disposable incomes than they had been able to do for themselves over the last 15 years and more than was done for them in a strong economy in 2005. The Retail Council of Canada said that the GST cut was a very powerful tool for increasing the incomes of Canadians. We believe that our promise to continue to reduce the GST by a further one per cent over

the next four to five years is one that Canadians will benefit from. That is an area where we disagreed with the opposition parties.

We also believe that money should be spent directly on providing services to Canadians rather than on advocacy or on high and burgeoning administration costs. We think it is extremely important that when money is spent, people see some measurable results, that it just does not end up funding more hot air being blown around, more talk shops, more round tables and more administration.

We also believe that money spent on the environment should do something for the environment. We heard a lot from the previous government about billions of dollars being spent on the environment, but when the environment commissioner gave her report, we found out that actually we not only were still at square one, we had actually gone backward, that greenhouse gas emissions were 35% more than they were when we started out spending these billions of dollars. How is that fair to Canadians? They work hard. They cough up \$6 billion or so. It is spent somewhere, but instead of making progress, we go backward. That is irresponsible. That is a complete abuse of hard-working men and women in our country. We cannot continue to do that.

We want to have responsible spending. We want to reduce the tax burden for Canadians. We also want to pay down Canada's mortgage, because every dollar by which we reduce a mortgage we save in interest every single year. We reduced Canada's mortgage this year by \$13.2 billion above the \$3 billion that would normally be paid down. That will free up almost \$700,000 every single year from here on out which we can spend on services for Canadians because it is not going to interest.

Canadians try to pay down their credit card balances because they know they save tons of interest by doing that. So does a country. We are committed to making that kind of sensible debt repayment happen for our country. It is not fair that we spend billions of dollars on interest every year and expect our kids to deal with it. That is irresponsible. It is unfair. It is taxation without representation. We want to get the debt down.

● (1335)

We are going to start with what we call the net debt, which is a measure that all countries use and the OECD uses, which is the total debt minus the assets of a country. Once we get the net debt down in 15 years, we will start on other debt reduction measures. This is extremely important for our country because it gives so much more freedom, fiscal freedom and freedom from being beholden to our debt holders from other countries as well.

We also want to make sure that we have results in excellence in our economy. Roger Martin, the chairman of the Institute for Competitiveness and Prosperity and dean of the Rotman School of Management, said in September:

In 1998, Canada stood sixth in this ranking of our business competitiveness and in 2001 we stood 11th.

In three years we slipped from sixth to 11th. Then he said:

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Over the years we've drifted down in the rankings as countries like Norway and Japan have stepped up their competitiveness.

Many of these countries are without the kind of natural advantages that we have. We want to stop that drift. That drift is not what Canadians want and it is not what they deserve. We want to start moving up. We want to be one of the most vibrant, most successful, most productive and most envied economies in the entire world. I believe that is possible because of Canadian know-how and because of Canadian initiative.

In addition, of course, we want to address the fiscal balance. The finance ministers will be meeting this weekend as a matter of fact. The finance ministers for the provinces, the territories and the federal government again will be having discussions not just on the fiscal balance but on how all of us can work together to ensure that Canada remains a top performer by every measure in the world, and not just economically. Environmentally we have done a lot with the clean air act and other measures to move forward on that. We want to make sure that our health care system is strong. The same is true for our infrastructure, our bridges, our roads, our airports, so that trade and commerce and travel will be easy in our country. All of those things are investments for the future and we are committed to doing that.

We believe that we need to have a plan, a forward looking vision, instead of just putting money here and money there with no coherent framework without a future goal in mind.

We have a strong plan called "Advantage Canada", which was just released in the fall update in November by the finance minister. It is dedicated to making sure that under clear, reasonable, prudent, well thought out management, our country can continue to grow and prosper, that we reverse the slide we have experienced in environmental quality, that we reverse the slide we have experienced in health care wait times, that we reverse the slide we have experienced in the past in our standing in competitiveness and productivity, and instead, now we have measures, a clear plan to move forward.

Some of the areas where we have gone backward cannot be reversed overnight. We inherited a bit of a mess in some areas, but I believe that with the plans that are in place and the measures that are going forward, step by step Canada is on the road not only to a recovery in some of the areas that are important to Canadians but also to a very strong, vibrant and prosperous future where our quality of life is protected, where it is enhanced and where Canada continues to be the envy of the world and for good reason.

We are excited about the recommendations in the report. We are excited about the vision that we have laid out in our supplementary opinion. We believe with future measures that will come in budget 2007 and in the framework of the "Advantage Canada" plan that has been put forward by our government, Canada is on the right track. It is in good hands. Our children and grandchildren too will be assured that a well managed and a prudently developed economy will be there for them in the coming years.

• (1340)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer):** Questions and comments. I see several MPs rising, so maybe we could have one minute questions and one minute responses so we can accommodate everybody.

The hon. member for Markham—Unionville.

**Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, perhaps this will not be a part of my minute, as I simply want to commend the hon. member on her speech. I think that all committee members had a productive journey together, even though we disagreed on several points.

My question has to do with the government's extreme unaccountability when it comes to telling Canadians what it is that it is cutting.

Today we Liberals released an access to information document from Natural Resources Canada which lists program cuts. This is a government document itemizing NRCan cuts totalling \$584 million and then saying, "cuts to other government programs \$6.8 billion". We on this side of the House have been trying for months to get the government to itemize those cuts totalling \$6.8 billion to Canadians.

When the Liberals were in government, we did expenditure review. On the very day of the budget, line by line every item was revealed.

It is many months after the budget and on the very day that the accountability act was signed into law, is it not ironic that on that the government displayed such a lack of accountability on its cuts?

**Ms. Diane Ablonczy:** Mr. Speaker, as my colleague said, we did have a very good time, a very enjoyable time and a very productive time travelling, discussing issues and talking with witnesses together.

I cannot help him on the specific question he asked without looking into it. I would be happy to do that. I think there has been a lot of information about spending reductions that will be coming forward.

I know the hon. member himself was heavily involved in a program of spending reductions for government when he was minister of revenue. I think he found a few billion dollars to cut. Programs always seem to grow tentacles and sort of spread outward. Sometimes those have to be pruned back.

If the hon. member would speak to me afterward, I will see if I can provide him with more information.

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague's speech with great interest. It did reveal a bit more of the sort of flat earth economics that is coming forward from the Conservative Party, in particular this notion of a net debt that is being floated, that somehow if we add our assets together, then we do not really have a debt. I do not think the government could tell any Canadian family that if they add up their savings, they do not have to pay off their mortgage.

I would like to follow up on this notion of a net debt and ask why the Conservatives have not added government buildings and national parks to our assets column. In fact, we could add enough assets that we would not have a debt at all and we would not have to worry about it. This seems to be the economic reasoning that I am getting from the Conservative Party, because a debt remains a debt regardless of whether it is paid. It comes to the idea of a vision of how we make a national economy.

*Government Orders*

What we have had is a debt that has been put into education for years. Students are now coming out of school with debts of \$20,000, \$30,000 and \$40,000. That is a real debt. That is a debt made by government decisions.

We have a debt in the environment as has been pointed out, because we need a commitment.

We have a debt in terms of infrastructure in every municipality across the country where money has not been put in to upkeep and the costs are being downloaded to municipalities. These bills have to be paid at the end of the day.

When we look for a vision of a 21st century economy from the Conservatives, they are creating this notion of a net debt and taking every dollar of surplus to pay off this debt. Meanwhile the other debts that remain outside have not been acted on.

I would like to correct the member's—

• (1345)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer):** The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance.

**Ms. Diane Ablonczy:** Mr. Speaker, I guess my colleague's accusation may have more credibility, except that the concept of net debt is one that is used all around the globe. It is the international standard. It is what the OECD uses. It is the way countries compare each other. This is exactly the standard that all other countries use. To somehow suggest that it is inappropriate I think maybe the hon. member would want to go to the OECD or the World Bank and make his case, but wiser heads than his, I might suggest, say that net debt is an entirely appropriate standard to start at.

With respect to the other debts, student debt, the national debt of over \$400 billion is a student debt. Guess who is going to get to pay it off. It will be students with their earnings in the future.

Every dollar we pay down on the nation's debt, no matter what it is called or how we quibble about its measurement or whether we challenge the OECD on it, is a mortgage that our kids are not going to have to pay. That is a good thing.

**Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I had the pleasure of being a member of the finance committee. It was an excellent experience and I thank the parliamentary secretary for her guidance and leadership on that committee.

We heard many times from opposition members at the committee that they were opposed to any further GST cuts. This really surprised me considering that one of the Liberals' platforms many years ago was to get rid of GST altogether.

I want to quote:

—the one policy move by the government [the GST cut] did more than twice as much for Canadians' real disposable incomes than they'd been able to do for themselves over the last 15 years, and more than was done for themselves in a strong economy in 2005. This was a very powerful tool for increasing the incomes of Canadians.

Could the parliamentary secretary tell us what the Conservative view is on tax cuts in this budget recommendation?

**Ms. Diane Ablonczy:** Mr. Speaker, there is a legitimate difference of opinion or debate about whether we should cut tax A, tax B or tax C. However, I think very few people believe that there is not room to

return more money to Canadians' pockets. Our federal government has run enormous, and some would say obscene, surpluses for years now and that is, pure and simple, overtaxation.

We made a plan to return money to Canadians' pockets, which included a 1% reduction in the GST, which we have already enacted, and another one to come. Economists can fight about this but the fact is that it helps the poorest Canadians. It is a reduction that all Canadians can see and it will be very hard for governments to reverse in a sneaky manner because the GST is a highly visible tax. There were some reasons why we picked that tax. I hope the House will support our plan overall.

**Hon. Joe McGuire (Egmont, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, one of the topics we discussed in the finance committee was the government's decision to eliminate the GST visitor rebate program.

As recently as last Thursday, the minister of the revenue agency was before the committee and I asked her if the government had changed its mind on rescinding that decision and she said not that she knew of.

Yesterday morning, the minister of tourism for Prince Edward Island announced that the Minister of Industry informed him and other tourism ministers that there was a change in the visitor rebate program and that at least part of it would continue to be applied.

Could the parliamentary secretary tell us whether that is true? Why does the government not extend it to all tourists, not just to those who come in on conventions?

• (1350)

**Ms. Diane Ablonczy:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his implied suggestion that I should be the minister of revenue but my colleague is doing an excellent job there.

This rebate for visitors has two parts. The first part is the rebate of the GST. Not only did only 3% of visitors ever take advantage of that, but the cost of administering it was absolutely enormous. That is one area in which I do not think there is very much dispute. It really was not a cost beneficial program.

The second part concerns the reductions in GST for tourism conventions, which I think is what my colleague is speaking about. Whether there is discussion about some accommodation with respect to that particular aspect of the rebate program, I do not know as I am not part of those discussions. However, if there is, I expect he will hear about it fairly quickly.

**Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to these issues and to thank all those Canadians from coast to coast to coast who appeared before our committee. Hundreds of Canadians submitted their views on the government's upcoming budget and I, along with all my colleagues, would like to thank them all, as well as to thank the clerk and the House of Commons staff who made our trip very pleasant and very well organized.

*Government Orders*

I recall some months ago, when replying to the budget, that I characterized that budget with three words: meanspirited, dishonest and unproductive. The events since the budget and our hearings across the country, as well as the proposals put forward in the fiscal update have simply reinforced those three themes. I would like to make my remarks today under those same three headings.

I will begin with the notion of meanspiritedness. The \$1 billion in cuts that the government announced some time ago came up just as we were crossing the country and meeting Canadians. Of all the people who came before our committee, many were there to protest the cuts and to describe to committee members the impact of those cuts, sometimes in graphic detail.

We had people come to our committee and decry and criticize the government for its cuts to literacy programs and to explain to us how crucial those were and how meanspirited it was to cut those programs. We had representatives from museums who described to committee members the great difficulties in their communities, sometimes small communities, caused by these cuts to museums. We had people complaining about the cuts to the court challenges program, to the internship program and to the Law Commission.

I am very pleased that the opposition parties came together on these matters and that we in opposition voted unanimously and with enthusiasm, as one of the recommendations of our committee, to reinstate those meanspirited cuts so that the government would cancel the cuts and restore the funding to Status of Women, to literacy programs, to the museums and so on because that was the clear consensus of Canadians we heard from coast to coast to coast. It also was the clear consensus of all opposition members on the committee.

I would point out one small example of supreme meanspiritedness. This reflects the disability committee that was advisory to the Minister of National Revenue. It was set up as a consequence of a technical report and when I was minister of revenue I remember inaugurating this committee to advise the minister of revenue on measures affecting disabled Canadians. Most members of the committee were disabled in some fashion themselves and so had first-hand experience on the issues. These people put in a great deal of work and just recently one committee member came to see me to report a couple of things.

First, he pointed out that the government had summarily terminated the services of this disability advisory committee to the Minister of National Revenue and of all such committees at a cost saving of 1/100 of 1% of the budget of the Canada Revenue Agency. However, this individual, a member of the committee, and his colleagues were enthusiastic about their work. They thought it was important to disabled Canadians so they were continuing their work on a volunteer basis even though they had been disbanded by the government. He also told me that the chair of the committee had written to the minister to ask for an explanation but has not, some months later, received a reply.

This example, while it is not major in terms of dollars, is a good reflection of the meanspiritedness of the government that it would simply summarily cut the work of a committee to advise the government on how to make the tax system more responsive to people with disabilities and how it would not even respond to the

chair of that committee when he wrote to the minister to ask for an explanation.

● (1355)

On the subject of meanspiritedness, the \$1 billion in cuts, which Canadians across the country opposed and which the committee voted to reinstate, are only the tip of the iceberg. We have been asking questions for months trying to get the government to tell Canadians what it is cutting that amounts to a total of over \$7 billion and the government has not come clean.

We, as an opposition, had to resort to access to information documents and we discovered the detailed cuts for Natural Resources Canada. This government document lists, under the heading "Program Cuts", NRCan affected programs, six or seven items totalling \$585 million. It says that other government programs \$6.9 billion. Evidently, the government has at its disposal information on cuts detailed in each and every department and we, in the opposition, despite efforts for months, have failed to convince the government to reveal those cuts to Canadians.

We do know there are major cuts in post-secondary education and in research. However, unlike our government which, when we did our expenditure review, we itemized every cut line by line on the day of the budget, the Conservative government, months later, has yet to come clean and explain to Canadians who the victims are and where the cuts have been made. We believe this is a matter of basic accountability.

My first point, to conclude on the question of meanspiritedness, is that Canadians from coast to coast to coast flooded to our committee to tell us the dire consequences of the cuts to Status of Women, literacy, museums and other cuts that have affected the most vulnerable Canadians. We, as an opposition, united in the committee report to urge the government to reinstate those cuts.

As I said, the \$1 billion in cuts are simply the tip of the iceberg. The government has yet to come clean with Canadians. This is a question of a basic lack of accountability. On this day of signing into law the accountability act, the government has yet to tell Canadians who will be affected by the additional \$7.4 billion in cuts.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer):** The hon. member can continue his speech after question period if he so chooses.

*Statements by Members***STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS**

•(1400)

*[English]***CANADIAN FORCES RESERVISTS**

**Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, on Sunday I was proud to participate in a Christmas parade of military vehicles along Whyte Avenue in my riding of Edmonton—Strathcona. The annual event was organized by Canadian Forces Reservists at the 15th Service Battalion Edmonton.

Led by Santa Claus in a light armoured vehicle, the procession made a stop at Edmonton Youth Emergency Shelter, where Santa and members of the unit distributed Christmas gifts. The parade ended at the Dianne and Irving Kipnes Centre for Veterans, where unit members hosted a reception for veterans and their families.

Reservists raised money throughout the year and presented cheques worth \$3,000 to both the Youth Emergency Shelter and the Kipnes Centre. This marks the battalion's ninth parade to share Christmas spirit and support worthy local charities.

I am proud of the work our men and women in uniform are doing here at home and overseas. Our soldiers exemplify the highest ideal of public service, and it was an honour to support their efforts this weekend.

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**CANADIAN CANCER SOCIETY RELAY FOR LIFE**

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windor, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, in the presence of my hon. colleagues, I would like to talk about the Canadian Cancer Society Relay for Life. The relay for life is a unique community event that recognizes individuals who have survived cancer and honours those who have lost their lives to the disease.

Recently I had the privilege of attending a cancer relay for life in the town of Bonavista in my riding. The event was attended by over 500 individuals from Bonavista and surrounding communities. The opening ceremony was a powerful and moving experience. To witness over 80 cancer survivors parade into the local arena amidst the applause of those in attendance was overwhelming.

Approximately \$40,000 were raised to go toward continuing research for a cure for this devastating disease that has touched nearly every family in Canada and certainly in the Bonavista area.

I commend the many organizers, volunteers, cancer survivors and the people of the Bonavista Peninsula who participated in making this event such a huge success.

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*[Translation]***MARIE-VINCENT FOUNDATION AWARD**

**Mr. Maka Kotto (Saint-Lambert, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Marie-Vincent Foundation award is handed out annually to an agency working to prevent child abuse. This year the award went to La Traversée, an agency in Saint-Lambert helping women and children who are victims of sexual abuse.

This award points up the merits of an innovative philosophy-based violence prevention program in 10 elementary schools in Longueuil. As Catherine Audrain, director of La Traversée, said so well, this project brings a bit of hope because it reduces violent behaviour in young people and integrates values such as respect, dialogue and tolerance.

This is a fine example of the work done by an agency committed to respect for women. Unfortunately, it is not by cutting programs for these agencies that the dogmatic Conservative government will help advance the cause of women.

\* \* \*

*[English]***THE ENVIRONMENT**

**Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, members of the Conservative Party continue to struggle against the idea that they are little more than laggards when it comes to the environment. Whenever they make this claim, one of their senior ministers makes a public statement to remove any lingering doubts.

First, the Prime Minister suggested that it was difficult to predict next week's weather, so how could he possibly believe global warming was a threat to Canadians. Now the Minister of Public Safety was "begging for Big Al Gore's glacial melt when the mercury hit -24".

The same minister went on to prove his utter misunderstanding of the pine beetle crisis and the impact that global warming had on it. I wonder if the same minister also still believes there is not enough evidence to prove that smoking actually causes cancer.

We are at the beginning of a legislative committee that will rewrite Bill C-30 and create what could be the most important environmental legislation in years. The NDP will fight hard to create hard targets and real timelines to ensure we change the course that Canada is on.

My fear is the Conservative members may have a lot of catching up to do. I strongly urge them to do much study over the Christmas holidays.

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**GOVERNMENT POLICIES**

**Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as Canadians prepare for the holiday season, this is a time for reflection, a time when Canadians can celebrate all the wonderful things of the past year. With this in mind, I would like to remind Canadians of the great things that have happened under Canada's new government.

Canadians are now experiencing a lower GST, as this government reduced it from 7% to 6%. The government has delivered tax credits to all families. We have delivered on our universal child care benefit. We continue to deliver on our get tough on crime bills. We have signed the softwood deal that lingered among Canadians for many years. Today we will finally pass the accountability act, which will say to all Canadians that this Parliament will now become accountable and responsible to the people of Canada.

*Statements by Members*

Canadians have much to be happy about, but particularly about a government that does what it says. On behalf Canada's—

• (1405)

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Oak Ridges—Markham.

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**OAK RIDGES—MARKHAM**

**Mr. Lui Temelkovski (Oak Ridges—Markham, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to speak in tribute to two long serving mayors from my riding, both of whom did not seek re-election in November after many years of public service.

Mayor Don Cousens of Markham was elected mayor in 1993 and Mayor William Bell of Richmond Hill was first elected mayor in 1988. They were both involved in politics even before then, and have a combined total of almost 60 years of public service to York region.

I send out my deepest appreciation and warmest wishes to former Mayors Bell and Cousens and wish them good health in their retirement years.

I also want to take this opportunity to congratulate three newly elected mayors: Dave Barrow in Richmond Hill, Frank Scarpitti in Markham and Wayne Emmerson in Whitchurch-Stouffville. I look forward to working with them in the coming days.

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**PRESIDENT OF THE WORLD UYGHUR CONGRESS**

**Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to welcome Madame Rabiya Kadeer, the President of the World Uyghur Congress and the nominee for the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize, to Ottawa.

Madame Kadeer, one of the most successful business people in China, eventually fell out of favour with Chinese authorities and was tried and wrongfully imprisoned for six long years.

Since her release, Madame Kadeer has championed the Uyghur cause from her home base in America. She has been all over the world raising the issue of China's human rights abuses with both governmental and non-governmental groups. She offers encouragement to all oppressed people around the world and is a role model that we in the House and Canadians across the country can applaud.

On behalf of my constituent, Huseyin Celil and his family, we thank her and commend her for the work she is doing to address the travesty of human rights abuses in China. She is a hero to many of us and we are honoured by her presence on the Hill today.

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[*Translation*]

**MUNICIPALITY OF VALCOURT**

**Mr. Robert Vincent (Shefford, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, it is with great pride that I acknowledge today the 150th anniversary of the municipality, parish and township of Valcourt in my riding.

The history of Valcourt began in 1856, when the parish was built. Since then, Valcourt has flourished through its industrial activities, a source of pride to all. The multinational company Bombardier is the

economic driver of the region. We also have the J. Armand Bombardier museum, which presents the life and works of this great inventor and entrepreneur. Valcourt has become the capital of snowmobiling.

We also have an incredible winter carnival, which celebrated its 40th anniversary this year. Each year, two outstanding personalities are named duke and duchess at this carnival.

Today, Valcourt has 2,500 inhabitants. I want to wish them all a wonderful time as they celebrate the 150th anniversary of their municipality, parish and township.

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**BLOC QUÉBÉCOIS**

**Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in a speech in Quebec City yesterday, the leader of the Bloc Québécois dared to claim that Quebec had regressed in the past year. This is more proof that ridicule never killed anyone.

Does the Bloc leader really believe that Quebec taxpayers are regressing, when our new government is keeping its promises, cutting taxes and reducing the GST?

Does the Bloc leaders sincerely believe that families in Quebec are regressing because they are now receiving \$1,200 annually for child care?

Does the Bloc leader really believe that the new generation of Quebecers is regressing, when our government is putting in place environmental standards for 2011 to reduce new vehicle fuel consumption in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions?

How can the Bloc leader claim that Quebec is regressing, when the province's unemployment rate is at its lowest level in more than 30 years?

The reality is that it is the Bloc that has been causing Quebec to regress for more than 13 years. Our new government is proud to represent Quebecers within a united Canada.

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**POLAND**

**Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, tomorrow, we will commemorate the anniversary of an event that holds great significance for Canada's Polish community.

On December 13, 1981, the communist government of Poland imposed martial law. This unfortunate event came in the wake of actions by the Solidarity movement to introduce democratic values and respect for human rights in Poland.

Many people were imprisoned, others died, and many found refuge in Canada.

[*English*]

The price the victims of martial law paid was not in vain. Liberty and democracy, values that all Canadians hold dear, prevailed. Today Poland is a sovereign country, a member of NATO and will send soldiers to Afghanistan.

[Translation]

In recognition of the ideals of the Solidarity movement, the imposition of martial law and the triumph of democratic values should be preserved in Canada's collective memory.

\* \* \*

• (1410)

#### EXERCISE OF GOVERNMENT POWERS

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we have, today, an interesting contrast in leadership. Three years ago, the Liberal member for LaSalle—Émard became Prime Minister, after Jean Chrétien, and added to 13 years of Liberal mess, mismanagement and scandal.

[English]

The member for LaSalle—Émard's years were especially highlighted by dithering, delay and virtually no action on any file.

Contrast this with 10 months of strong leadership by our government: accountability in government, done; pension splitting for seniors, done; choice in child care, done; and our GST cut for every Canadian, done.

The comparisons are very striking. Unlike the last Liberal government, which was dominated by scandal and only looked after its Liberal friends, our government is getting things done for all Canadians. This is what Canadians asked us to do and this is what we are doing.

\* \* \*

#### MARRIAGE

**Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, last week the House voted not to reconsider legislation that opened marriage to gay and lesbian couples. The Prime Minister has said that as far as he is concerned the matter is settled. That is good news for gay and lesbian Canadians, for gay and lesbian couples, who have decided to be married and for those who support them. However, problems still exist with the government's approach to marriage.

The Department of Citizenship and Immigration has a so-called interim policy for gay and lesbian Canadians, sponsoring a spouse for immigration purposes. It will not recognize a legal marriage performed in another country. It will not recognize legal marriages performed in the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, South Africa or Massachusetts. Instead, these couples must use the common law or conjugal partner application process. This is inappropriate, discriminatory and just plain wrong. It will not survive a court challenge, but couples should not be forced to use that route again.

The Minister of Citizenship and Immigration must fix this immediately by recognizing all legal gay and lesbian marriages performed in other jurisdictions in exactly the same way heterosexual marriages are recognized.

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#### CRA DISABILITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, one of the first actions taken by the so-called new government under the

#### Statements by Members

Conservatives was to terminate the CRA Disability Advisory Committee.

The purpose of this committee was to help the Canada Revenue Agency make meaningful improvements to the tax treatment of people living with disabilities. This all volunteer committee was created with the unanimous consent of the House of Commons, and I might add, with the support of the current Prime Minister.

Since the committee was terminated last September, the members have continued to meet on a monthly basis simply because the work is too important to be abandoned.

If the government is really serious about improving the lives of disabled Canadians, I call upon the Minister of National Revenue to immediately recognize the continuing work of the disability advisory committee.

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[Translation]

#### KOFI ANNAN

**Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, December 31 will be the end of Kofi Annan's term of office as the seventh Secretary General of the United Nations. For ten years fraught with conflict in Africa, including in Darfur, and the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, he undertook the reforms needed to ensure the UN's credibility.

He is the first Secretary General to come out of the organization. He started there in 1962 as an administrative and budget officer. He then moved up the ladder to the post of Secretary General.

In his farewell speech yesterday, Mr. Annan issued a strong warning to the Americans regarding their attitude in the war in Iraq, reminding them, among other things, that major powers intervening in a conflict must do so in a multilateral context.

The Bloc Québécois congratulates Kofi Annan on his contribution to peace in the world.

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[English]

#### STATUS OF WOMEN

**Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, 2006 should be a year of celebration for the 25th anniversary of Canada's ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, known as CEDAW. However, we are not celebrating today.

The new government has made disturbing decisions to change the funding criteria for women's groups, remove the word "equality" from their mandates, bar them from doing advocacy work and cut the operating budgets and offices of Status of Women Canada. Further, the court challenges program and the national child care program have been cancelled.

*Oral Questions*

Women in Waterloo region and throughout Canada have been and will continue to be negatively impacted by these changes. It is absolutely unacceptable that women's voices will be weakened by actions taken by a Canadian government.

Canada, as a progressive country with a reputation of respecting women's human rights, should be leading the way forward, not backward. When will the government honour the principles of equality and fairness that all Canadians value?

\* \* \*

• (1415)

[Translation]

**BLOC QUÉBÉCOIS**

**Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in Quebec City yesterday, the Bloc Québécois leader dared to suggest that the Conservative government has caused Quebec to regress.

Does the leader of the Bloc Québécois really believe that recognizing Quebecers as a nation within a united Canada constitutes a step backwards? Does the leader of the Bloc Québécois really believe that the Conservative government caused Quebec to regress when it put an end to the Liberal culture of entitlement by passing the accountability act, the strongest anti-corruption legislation ever seen in Canada? Does the leader of the Bloc Québécois really believe that Quebec is regressing, while his party supported our Speech from the Throne, our 2006 budget and the softwood lumber agreement?

Yet, according to the Bloc Québécois, these gains mean a step backwards for Quebec, because the Bloc Québécois' raison d'être is not to defend the interests of Quebecers in Ottawa, rather it is to defend its own separatist agenda.

**The Speaker:** The time allotted for the statements by members has expired.

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**ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS**

[Translation]

**NEW MEMBER**

**The Speaker:** I have the honour to inform the House that the Clerk of the House has received from the Chief Electoral Officer a certificate of the election and return of Mr. Raymond Gravel, member for the electoral district of Repentigny.

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**NEW MEMBER INTRODUCED**

Mr. Raymond Gravel, member for the electoral district of Repentigny, is introduced by Mr. Gilles Duceppe and Mr. Michel Guimond.

**The Speaker:** I invite the hon. member to take his seat.

**ORAL QUESTIONS**

[English]

**GOVERNMENT POLICIES**

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, through access to information, we have been able to confirm where a part of \$7.4 billion in additional cuts will be made. Let us guess where: in areas as vital as research and development, post-secondary education and the environment.

Why does the government continue to insist on these damaging neo-conservative cuts? When will this stop?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition is wrong. I notice the list of environmental programs he cited. Under the previous government, the Liberals had these Kyoto environmental programs and emissions went up. What this government has committed to is that we are re-examining all the programs and we will bring in programs where emissions will go down instead of up.

That is why, far from just getting rid of these programs, we will be replacing them with far more effective programs.

• (1420)

[Translation]

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has confirmed that \$7.4 billion in cuts were made, as the assistant deputy minister told the Standing Committee on Finance on May 10. What we do not know is where the cuts were made. We have obtained part of the answer thanks to the Access to Information Act.

I am asking for a minimum of transparency from the Prime Minister. He must make public the exact list of cuts that have been made.

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this government announced budget cuts of \$1 billion in September. The Leader of the Opposition is referring to our intention to replace certain environmental programs with more effective programs. That is necessary because the Leader of the Opposition, when he was Minister of the Environment, had the worst track record of any environment minister in the world. This country must improve its performance.

[English]

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would be very pleased to debate with the Prime Minister on his policy about the environment and our policy, but today—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Speaker:** Order, please. The hon. Leader of the Opposition has the floor.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, today what we need to have is a minimum of transparency from the Prime Minister. For a week we have been asking him when he knew that the Commissioner of the RCMP would change his story. He has been unable to answer.



*Oral Questions*

Today we are asking him where will he make these cuts. Where will these cuts happen? He is unable to answer. I ask the Prime Minister, how long will he hide the truth from Canadians?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition does not like the answers he gets, which is that his facts are wrong.

I will say that on this side of the House we certainly look forward to debating the environmental record of the Liberal leader. In fact, we will be able to quote his own seatmate from Etobicoke—Lakeshore, who said that he had a chance to do something for the environment and he just did not deliver. The Liberal leader has a record on the environment that is no different from the record of Alfonso Gagliano on accountability.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**THE ENVIRONMENT**

**Hon. John Godfrey (Don Valley West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday in committee, the Minister of the Environment was asked whether or not Canada's contribution to the UN for the clean development mechanism of the Kyoto protocol had been paid in full. She indicated that it had, and then was immediately contradicted by an assistant deputy minister who stated that Canada was behind on a \$1.5 million payment.

Has the minister now authorized the \$1.5 million payment?

[*English*]

**Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I can confirm again what I said at committee, which was accurate. Canada has met all of its obligations. All of our mandatory obligations under the Kyoto protocol were paid up in full. I have the United Nations document here to prove it if the member would like me to table it.

I would appreciate it if the hon. member retracted the comment.

**Hon. John Godfrey (Don Valley West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday the assistant deputy minister of foreign affairs said that we had not paid, so she must have paid overnight.

At her first appearance the Minister of the Environment said that she would never use the clean development mechanism to purchase international emission credits. Yesterday she said she would use the clean development mechanism to purchase international emission credits, if they were duly authorized and proven to lead to reductions of greenhouse gases.

Will she or will she not use the clean development mechanism?

• (1425)

**Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, let me put this on the record once and for all. This government will not use taxpayer money to purchase international credits, period. And we definitely will not do what the last government did which was to spend millions of dollars through the World Bank carbon funds to buy international credits which got us no closer to our Kyoto target than 1%.

[*Translation*]

**AFGHANISTAN**

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, a few weeks ago, the Prime Minister attended a meeting of NATO member nations, where he half-heartedly asked for greater military involvement by member nations and more support for rebuilding Afghanistan. Not surprisingly, given that he himself was unconvinced of the importance of what he was asking, the Prime Minister returned empty-handed, without having obtained any assurances from NATO members.

Does the Prime Minister realize that if the Afghan mission does not change, if the mission is not rebalanced and if the member nations refuse to do their part, the mission is doomed to failure?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our closest allies in the south, such as the Dutch, the British, the Estonians and others, are helping to increase troops in Afghanistan. Clearly, we have a great deal of support, which will help us achieve success in the long term.

I noticed yesterday that the Leader of the Opposition had spoken out against the mission in Afghanistan. Yet today, the Bloc Québécois website says that despite its reservations, the Bloc supports Canada's military presence in Afghanistan.

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister may now have realized that the issue is not whether or not we should be in Afghanistan, but how we should be there as part of a balanced mission.

The problem with this Prime Minister is his obtuse ideological approach. He sees the world exclusively in terms of good and bad, white and black.

Will he stop using soldiers, for whom I have the utmost respect, solely for his simplistic ideological aims?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our soldiers in Afghanistan have a very dangerous mission. They are involved in economic development and humanitarian assistance, but the fact is that the security situation is dangerous. Therefore, their resources are needed. Some soldiers have even been killed recently while engaging in development activities. We must help our soldiers in Afghanistan for the sake of their security.

The only problem here is the Bloc Québécois leader's political opportunism. He is using our soldiers to play political games.

**Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, last October, General David Richards, Commander of NATO forces in Afghanistan, said that 70% of Afghans would side with the Taliban if living conditions do not improve within the next six months.

Should the government not talk to its NATO partners about making major adjustments to the balance between the humanitarian and military aspects of the mission in Afghanistan?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, NATO statements clearly indicate that there can be no security without development and no development without security. There is no separating the two.

### Oral Questions

Once again, the Bloc is being opportunistic. I would like to quote the House leader of the Bloc Québécois. In September, he said: "Even though the mission is difficult right now, immediate unconditional withdrawal would be irresponsible toward our soldiers, toward Afghanistan and toward the other nations to whom we promised we would do this work. We must support our soldiers."

**Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister just said exactly what we are saying. We need a better balance for this mission, not a withdrawal.

Unfortunately, the Prime Minister has a very narrow vision of the operations in Afghanistan where the military aspect has taken over and is pushing a major segment of the Afghan population right into the arms of the Taliban.

Rather than go along with George W. Bush's strategy, should the Prime Minister not make a major effort to convince his partners to do more in terms of humanitarian intervention?

• (1430)

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this government is in Afghanistan for a military mission, for economic development and for humanitarian aid. The Bloc Québécois changes its position just to play games at the expense of our military. That is unacceptable.

\* \* \*

### THE ENVIRONMENT

**Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, a new report on the Arctic Ocean's ice cover indicates that it could disappear completely by 2040. Global warming is having a devastating effect on our health, economy and quality of life.

Will the Prime Minister act as quickly as possible to impose a ceiling for major industrial polluters in Canada or will he wait for all the ice in the far north to melt?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we recognize the threats posed by these problems and that is why we are the first government to propose a national law to regulate greenhouse gas emissions and air pollutants. It is vital that the parties in this Chamber work hard to pass this bill and to have effective legislation that will give real results.

[English]

**Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, under this law, the Prime Minister's targets do not have any real effect until 2050. That is 10 years after the Arctic will have melted. That is not acceptable.

The oil and gas sector puts out 20% of the greenhouse gas emissions in our country and this government, just like the previous one, wants to continue to subsidize it with massive subsidies. In addition, it refuses to put real controls on the big polluters.

Will the government support the NDP's call for strong emission caps on big polluters, starting within 12 months from now?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, actually just like the framework bill that the hon. member presented, this government's clean air act outlines a plan to have targets in the next few years all the way to 2050, not starting in 2050

but ending in 2050, short term targets, medium term targets and long term targets.

We want to make sure we have targets. We are in discussions with industry to make sure we have targets that are attainable and that will achieve results. I think this government has made absolutely clear in the Minister of Finance's tax fairness package that we will have tax fairness for all industries, and all industries, including the oil and gas sector, will pay their fair share of taxes.

\* \* \*

### POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

**Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, students and parents were shocked to learn the government is abandoning \$2.9 billion worth of programs that help low income Canadians go to university and college. With only 21% of low income youth attending university, the government has put another barrier in their way.

Why is the meanspirited minority government punishing these Canadians when it was sitting on a \$13 billion surplus?

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I think it is time that the hon. member actually worked with the facts for a change. He is confusing his government and the \$4 billion that it cut from post-secondary education with the investments that we are making to help students, including \$1 billion in infrastructure, including a textbook tax credit and including increased eligibility for Canada student loans.

\* \* \*

### GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

**Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the minister says one thing; the government's briefing books say another. It is time for the minister to be honest with Canadians.

It is clear the Conservative ideology is that if people are poor, if they are homeless, if they are aboriginal, if they have disabilities, they do not count.

Why has the government turned its back on people who want to learn to read and write or who want a decent job and a better life for their family?

• (1435)

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member would like something to look at, I suggest he look in the mirror, because that is where he will see where all those cuts were made.

This government, Canada's new government, is investing in students, investing in adult learning, investing in over 800,000 working Canadians through our apprenticeship programs, our child tax credits, to create the people with skills that will fill the jobs that are needed, the ones that the previous government did not even bother with.

*Oral Questions***STATUS OF WOMEN**

**Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, across Canada women are protesting the ideological cuts of the government and the removal of equality provisions. Now there is more evidence that over the next five years \$1.8 billion will be cut from skills development programs that directly affect women trying to upgrade literacy and other skills to enter the workforce.

The minister has carried out the single largest attack on women's services in the history of this country. Does the minister not understand that her job is to defend women, not to attack them?

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

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Speaker:** Order. Order. The hon. the President of the Treasury Board has been recognized to answer this question. The House is going to want to hear his answer.

**Hon. John Baird (President of the Treasury Board, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is certainly entitled to her own opinion, but the member opposite is not entitled to her own facts. I say to the member opposite very directly, where did she find this alleged briefing note? On the grassy knoll?

**Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is obvious the minister is not allowed to answer her questions.

The minister's cavalier attitude toward women knows no bounds. In a letter to me on November 28 she stated that the women's program will receive \$10.8 million, but there is no mention of the reallocation of the \$5 million that she cut. Now her story has changed. She does not know whether she is coming or going.

Yesterday, the minister tried to justify closing 12 regional offices by saying women can use the Internet. Does she have any idea how contemptuous that sounds when many women have no access and offices are thousands of kilometres—

**The Speaker:** The hon. the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

**Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I think we have to again reiterate the straight facts.

Ten point eight million dollars in the women's program was there, is there and will be there. Five million dollars that was found in streamlining and more efficiency for Status of Women will be seen in the next budget for women's projects that are going to help women directly in the community.

We know that we can provide the resources needed to support women in every community, not just where offices were located.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**NATIONAL DEFENCE**

**Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence is about to spend \$4.9 billion for aircraft that the Pentagon no longer wants because they have so many defects.

Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of National Defence tell us that if Canada wishes to purchase these planes for \$188 million, or three

times the cost to Americans, who paid between \$44 million and \$67 million per plane, it is because the Lockheed Martin officials declared that they have fixed the main defects of these planes?

We are about to pay three times the price for planes that the Americans no longer want.

[English]

**Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I read the news reports. They are based on information provided by competitors that is basically fallacious. There are no technical problems with the C-130 and we are getting them at the proper price.

[Translation]

**Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, official U.S. reports list the main defects of these planes and the U.S. wishes to terminate its contract.

Does the Minister of National Defence realize that he is no longer a lobbyist and that his job is not to maximize a company's profit at the expense of taxpayers, but to make the best investment with taxpayers' money?

That is his work. Above all we must never repeat the error already made when we spent millions of dollars to buy old submarines that never worked properly.

● (1440)

[English]

**Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the requirements were set by the military. This aircraft meets the requirements. We will not purchase paper aircraft or paper trucks.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY**

**Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Industry announced yesterday—and this is by no means good news for the regions—that deregulation of telephone service was a good thing for consumers, because it would lead to greater competition.

If the minister is so sure that subscribers in outlying regions will not be the victims of this dubious strategy, can he assure us that the regions will not ultimately be paying the price of the short term and short lived rate reductions in the major centres?

**Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the question is clear, and the response will be equally so. In the document we released yesterday, this government has no intention of changing any of the regulations in Canada's outlying regions. The status quo will remain, and the regions will enjoy reasonable and competitive rates.

*Oral Questions*

**Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the minister's approach will still prevent regional subscribers from enjoying the same rights as urban subscribers.

Is this why the minister, who talks of openness and transparency, plans to hold consultations on his proposal in the middle of the Christmas break, between December 15 and January 15.

Does the minister not realize that he would not have acted any differently had he wanted to impose his opinion and that this approach leaves him looking ridiculous?

**Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday, we presented a proposal for reform so that all Canadians might benefit from competition. In cities where competition exists, it is not normal for a government body to be setting rates.

Accordingly, the market will now set the rates. Consumers will benefit from competitive prices, better service and, in the end, the telecommunications industry will provide services that meet consumer needs.

\* \* \*

[English]

**MAHER ARAR INQUIRY**

**Mr. Omar Alhabra (Mississauga—Erindale, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Prime Minister asked members of the House to come forward with all they know about the Arar affair. Let us see, on June 23, 2004, the Prime Minister said that there had been mixed messages, "not just in the House of Commons, but to us privately, even, by—I'm probably not at liberty to say much here—authorities in this country, that had suggested the deportation of Mr. Arar was appropriate. And then we found out later that may be not the case".

What did the Prime Minister know on June 23, 2004 that he was not at liberty to disclose?

**Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I tried to follow that as closely as possible. There was a long sequence of events being articulated there.

I can tell the House what has happened. The Prime Minister has given very clear direction right from the beginning of this affair which took place under the federal Liberal government. We wanted to get answers. We have received and accepted all 23 recommendations of Justice O'Connor's report.

I was pleased to table in the House of Commons the second part of the report today and also pleased to table the information relating to an inquest into three more individuals. That needs to be followed up in terms of what happened to those individuals under the previous Liberal government.

**Mr. Omar Alhabra (Mississauga—Erindale, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House we will support any attempt by the minister to change his profession to that of a comedian because Canadians deserve a minister who will deal with this issue seriously. Canadians expect us to ask these questions. The Conservatives may not like them, but they have a responsibility to answer them.

Canadians are uneasy given the historical attitude of the Conservatives toward Mr. Arar. We want clear answers. What was

the private information given to the Prime Minister about Arar and who gave it to him?

**Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we are all quite aware in our present profession that a backup position is always a good thing to have, and any assistance members opposite want to provide me for my future, I would be interested in pursuing.

I can also say that one former minister after another, including the present Leader of the Opposition, sat around the cabinet table and apparently did not even ask questions on this, on the sponsorship scandal nor on funds that went missing. Never mind June 23, on January 23 of this year Canadians made a decision that they wanted parliamentarians who would get answers and get action for them.

\* \* \*

• (1445)

[Translation]

**TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY**

**Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Industry played Santa Claus yesterday to the large telecommunications companies by unveiling his plan to deregulate telecommunications, which will create a significant imbalance between rural areas and urban centres.

Mr. Charles Tanguay of the Union des consommateurs denounced this travesty, saying that this is a huge Christmas present for Bell, TELUS and the other telecommunications companies, but in the end, it will be the consumers who are left to foot the bill.

Does the minister not realize that, while trying to play Santa Claus, he is in fact acting more like the Grinch?

**Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise here today to explain to my hon. colleague what happened yesterday.

The government made a proposal yesterday that would allow all Canadians to benefit from competitive telephone services. It is not right that Canadians cannot benefit from competitive prices in 2006, and the reform we are currently proposing to Parliament is a pro-consumer reform.

We believe that consumers will benefit from increased competition, with no negative effect on the industry in Canada's remote areas.

[English]

**Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, let me tell the minister what happened in the United States when it had the same deregulation. Consumers not only paid higher prices for their telephone services, but they also have less service and less innovation.

This scheme that the minister now has announced, without any notice to anybody, cuts the CRTC from setting phone rates, eliminates competition and consumer choice, and forces rural Canadians to finance temporary discounts in urban centres. If the Minister of Industry wants to play Santa Claus to the big telcos, he should do it on his own dime and not out of the pockets of consumers in rural Canada or elsewhere.

*Oral Questions*

Will the minister admit that he is giving consumers coal in their stockings and a huge Christmas bonus to the telcos with a big—

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Industry.

**Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am again going to say the same thing. It is very clear that what we want to do is give Canadians the freedom of choice. That is most important. We believe that individuals should be able to choose the services they want at the price they want. We will not touch the rural and remote areas in this country.

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**FEDERAL ACCOUNTABILITY ACT**

**Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, when Canadians voted for change in the way government is accountable to the people, they voted for our Conservative government. When they were voting to end years of Liberal corruption and mismanagement, Canadians voted for our Conservative government. The federal accountability act has often been referred to as the toughest anti-corruption law in Canadian history and was brought forward by our Conservative government.

Could the President of the Treasury Board please advise the House on the status of the federal accountability act?

**Hon. John Baird (President of the Treasury Board, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I know all members, particularly Conservative members, will be thrilled this afternoon when at 5:30 p.m. the toughest anti-corruption bill to ever go through the House becomes the law of the land. We will put an end to the billion dollar boondoggles that characterized the Liberal Party's time in power. We will clean up government. We will do what we said we would do to restore honesty and integrity to the federal government.

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**NATIONAL DEFENCE**

**Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, today *Le Devoir* reported on a controversy that has been raging in the U.S. It is over Lockheed Martin's C-130J, the plane that the Minister of National Defence seems to be determined to buy.

The Pentagon's inspector general describes the plane as one that cannot perform search and rescue operations, cannot perform night operations, and has difficulties in cold weather. How can it protect our Canadian Arctic?

Will the minister please explain to the House how this plane fits into his national defence capabilities plan, the plan he still has not finished?

**Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I can assure the House that this aircraft meets the requirements of the military as a medium lift aircraft and meets all the requirements, including weather.

**Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, that is not the opinion of the Pentagon. It is likely that these planes are going to turn out to be lemons, just like the Victoria class submarines.

The minister has been running a closed shop on procurement. The Minister of Industry met with Boeing last spring in Washington, a closed door meeting, about helicopters. There are only two

companies left to build support ships and the truck contract was written so that only one supplier could possibly fulfill it.

Inside the department, it is unclear who is driving this process. Is it the minister, is it Rick Hillier?

• (1450)

**Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should take another acting lesson.

The requirements set for aircraft, trucks and ships are set by the military and go through a competitive process with the defence department, industry department and public works. We have followed all those processes. Whatever the results are, they are done through a fair, competitive and open process.

**Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the requirements identified by DND for the purchase of tactical aircraft were designed to eliminate all aircraft except the C-130J. This is very much like a contract directed to Lockheed Martin masquerading as a competition at the expense of the taxpayers.

Given that the competition in defence procurement always favours better equipment at a better price, why was this process manipulated to limit the competition to one particular aircraft?

**Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have answered this question four times today, but I will try again. The military set the requirements for this aircraft. After a rigorous process, it discovered that the C-130J met the requirements and it was the only aircraft that met the requirements.

**Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, during the committee of the whole debate, the minister admitted that he was not aware of the price we were about to pay for the C-130J. The government's purchase price of \$3.2 billion suggests a price of \$188 million per plane. Italy is paying approximately \$80 million for the same product.

Could the minister tell us why his government plans to pay \$100 million more per plane? That is a scandalous \$1.7 billion for 17 planes.

**Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have also answered this question previously. The price per aircraft is \$85 million U.S. That is what we are paying. All the other costs involve spare parts, training, project management, et cetera.

[Translation]

**Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I will repeat the question in French.

*Oral Questions*

Just when the Department of National Defence is about to spend \$4.9 billion, without a call for tenders, on planes that even the Pentagon no longer wants, we learn that the Lockheed Martin C-130J has neither civil certification nor the upgrading capabilities to meet the needs of our armed forces. Some experts even say this plane is dangerous and inadequate.

How can the minister justify spending \$188 million per plane, when the White House wanted to end its contract for these aircraft, which cost that administration under \$80 million each? Why does he want to pass these lemons on to us?

[*English*]

**Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it might have been better if some of these members coordinated their questions today. They could have asked some other questions in Parliament. The answer is that the military set the requirements and the only aircraft that met the requirements was the C-130J. The military is quite happy with that choice.

**Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, let us try again the chief lobbyist, the defence man.

Canada is about to buy expensive flying lemons. The minority Conservative government chose to buy, without any real competitive process, Lockheed Martin's C-130Js as a favour to its buddies in Washington. Not only are we about to pay more than double the original price, \$188 million instead of \$80 million per plane, but the technology in the flying jalopy has been ruled obsolete by the U.K. and unsafe by a U.S. military auditor.

How does the minister justify spending \$3.2 billion for 17 underperforming planes? Why such—

**The Speaker:** The right hon. Prime Minister.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Speaker:** Order, please. The Prime Minister has been recognized to answer the question and everyone will want to hear the answer.

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence just pointed out the errors in the hon. member's question. We see here once again the Liberals opposing new equipment for our military under all circumstances, just as they did for 13 long years in office when they starved the military. However, it is amazing to what extent they are prepared to go to do it, saying that the White House and the Pentagon should pick Canada's planes. We are going to pick our own planes.

\* \* \*

• (1455)

[*Translation*]

**SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

**Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, a number of socio-economic and political stakeholders from the Quebec City area, and the Bloc Québécois, have come out in favour of the creation of the Boîte à science, a science and technology exploration centre for promoting science to young people. Although the hon. member for Lévis—Bellechasse voiced his support for the project during the last election campaign, the Conservatives voted against this project in the Standing Committee on Finance.

Can the Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec clarify the position of his government on this project and tell us whether he intends to support it?

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, during the last election campaign, the hon. member did not support the Boîte à science project very strongly and now, all of sudden, she wants to talk about it.

That said, the agency is currently asking for a \$500,000 contribution from us to get going, if you will, on their feasibility studies for this \$30 million project.

One thing will be clear: if we go ahead with the study, if the Boîte à science is built following a decision in the future, it will have to be viable and not continually subsidized by Canada Economic Development year after year.

**Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, if the Boîte à science project has support from the hon. member for Lévis—Bellechasse, can the Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec tell us why the Bloc Québécois did not receive support from the Conservatives in the Standing Committee on Finance to ensure the development, when we know that the Museum of Science and Technology in Ottawa has received over \$55 million over the past two years?

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this matter is part of the program of my department, Canada Economic Development. Again, we are currently being asked for \$500,000, with Quebec and other private partners. If we move forward, this means another \$30 million later and there is talk of operating costs to the tune of \$7 million annually. Hon. members will understand that before spending a future \$30 million, we have to make sure the project is viable.

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**AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD**

**Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the president of the Union des producteurs agricoles is against this government's decision to take no extraordinary measures to help Saint-Amable producers. They are struggling with an infestation of golden nematodes that prompted the United States to place an embargo on the harvest, thus depriving the producers of income.

Why is this government condemning producers to watch their crops rot in quarantine warehouses and assume millions of dollars in losses by themselves?

*Oral Questions*

**Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, that is not true. The federal government proposed a disaster relief plan for Saint-Amable. In addition to the \$3.4 million CFIP, there is another special program that is giving families in Saint-Amable \$2 million. We will continue to work with the farmers of Saint-Amable. The federal government fully supports farmers.

[English]

**Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, areas of farmland across Canada have suffered severe drought conditions this past year, including areas of my own riding of Peace River. Farmers are at their wits' end and have been forced to sell off their cattle because they are unable to feed them through this winter. They will be facing additional expenses when they have to buy replacement cattle this spring.

This situation requires that the government take action. Can the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food tell the House what the government is planning to do to help these farmers get back on their feet?

**Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our new government is acutely aware of the drought situation in certain parts of Canada and the difficulty these farmers are going through.

That is why today I am pleased to announce a tax deferral for producers in affected areas who have had to sell their cattle due to drought. The money they save from the tax deferral this year will greatly assist them as they have to restock their herds in the spring.

This is good news for farmers. It is part of our government's ongoing commitment to farmers. Farmers come first in this caucus.

\* \* \*

**FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

**Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday's *Globe and Mail* carried a picture of the Prime Minister shaking hands with Afghan warlord Mullah Naqib, a man who admits using his influence to free a leading suspect in the masterminding of the suicide bombing that killed Canadian diplomat Glyn Berry and injured three of our soldiers.

Can the Prime Minister explain Canada's relationship with Mullah Naqib and why he saw fit to meet with him?

• (1500)

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Very briefly, Mr. Speaker, I met Mullah Naqib when I visited the Canadian provincial reconstruction team in Kandahar, where he met me as part of a delegation of Canadian and Afghan officials. He was introduced to me as an individual who had been involved in the insurgency and was now working on our side.

I would point out that if the hon. member reads the rest of the story carefully, she will see that much of the allegations in there are speculative.

**Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, this situation gets worse. Not only did the Prime Minister stage a photo

op with this shadowy warlord, he rolled out the welcome mat for Naqib to visit Canada.

Is offering hospitality and a handshake to the warlord credited with subverting the police investigation into these tragic Canadian deaths the Prime Minister's concept of justice for the families of diplomat Glyn Berry and three of our soldiers wounded in action? Or, given Mullah Naqib's close association with the Taliban leadership, is this the Prime Minister's notion of dialogue with combatants? Which is it?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Once again, Mr. Speaker, I was introduced to Mullah Naqib, and in fact at the Glyn Berry room, at the provincial reconstruction team in Kandahar. He was introduced to me as an individual who was assisting Canadian and Afghan government officials.

\* \* \*

**ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS**

**Mr. Blair Wilson (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is clear that the Prime Minister sees the charter as an impediment to his goal, which he made public in writing last July, of undermining native based fisheries. The Prime Minister has stood by in silence while the member for Delta—Richmond East campaigns aggressively against new treaties that give first nations access to the Fraser River fishery. At the same time, he slams the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development for negotiating the deals.

My question is straightforward. Who does the Prime Minister stand behind, the member of Parliament who refuses to recognize these constitutional rights, or his minister who wants to uphold them? Which is it?

**Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the three treaties that have been signed in British Columbia speak for themselves.

Certainly there are people who have many different points of view with respect to these treaties, including the member who has been referenced. I would point out that he and I have had a respectful dialogue about this subject. This is a free country. Everyone is entitled to their point of view. In our caucus, we have an opportunity for people to speak up, unlike the party opposite.

\* \* \*

**FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

**Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, like many Canadians, I am alarmed by the Iranian government's decision to hold a conference questioning the historical accuracy of the Holocaust.

Can the Minister of Foreign Affairs tell the House how the government will respond to this decision and, in particular, if the government will publicly condemn this outrageous exercise?

**Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as my friend has referenced, this conference was in fact an outrage. It was an insult to Holocaust victims. It was an insult to their descendants.

*Routine Proceedings*

Canada's new government and I am sure many others in this House and around the globe condemn this conference, just as we have previously condemned the Iranian president's comments about the Holocaust as hateful.

Canada would never take part in such a sham of a conference. However, we would highlight the work of the task force for international cooperation on Holocaust education, remembrance, and research. Canada participated there as a special guest in Hungary last week. We commend this ongoing work that actually serves humanity while this despicable, provocative conference is taking place in Tehran.

\* \* \*

**BANKRUPTCY AND INSOLVENCY**

**Hon. Garth Turner (Halton, Ind.):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Labour. Last year more than 85,000 Canadians went bankrupt, yet the government is introducing legislation that is about to make it easier for creditors to seize the retirement savings of bankrupt Canadians. Will the minister please tell Canadians exactly why the government is about to put their savings more at risk?

[Translation]

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member is referring to Bill C-55, which enables employees to collect lost wages in case of bankruptcy. The House unanimously supported this bill under the previous government. That is why there is now a notice of ways and means with respect to the bill.

If this House wishes to move forward this afternoon or later, tomorrow, we could pass it on first, second and third reading, then refer it to the Senate for thorough study.

\* \* \*

● (1505)

[English]

**PRESENCE IN GALLERY**

**The Speaker:** I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of Mr. John Steffler, the new Poet Laureate of Parliament.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear!

**ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS**

[English]

**COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE**

## CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

The House resumed from December 11 consideration of the motion.

**The Speaker:** It being 3:05 p.m., pursuant to order made on Monday, December 11, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion to incur in the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration in the name of the member for Burnaby—Douglas.

Call in the members.

● (1515)

[Translation]

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

(Division No. 95)

**YEAS**

## Members

Alghabra	André
Angus	Asselin
Atamanenko	Bagnell
Bains	Barbot
Beaumier	Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Bell (North Vancouver)	Bellavance
Bennett	Bevilacqua
Bevington	Bigras
Black	Blais
Bonin	Bonsant
Boshcoff	Bouchard
Bourgeois	Brisson
Brown (Oakville)	Brunelle
Byrne	Cardin
Carrier	Chan
Charlton	Chow
Christopherson	Coderre
Comartin	Comuzzi
Cotler	Crête
Crowder	Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
Cullen (Etobicoke North)	Cuzner
D'Amours	Davies
DeBellefeuille	Demers
Deschamps	Dewar
Dhaliwal	Dhalla
Dion	Dosanjh
Dryden	Easter
Eyking	Faille
Folco	Freeman
Fry	Gagnon
Gauthier	Godfrey
Godin	Goodale
Graham	Gravel
Guarnieri	Guay
Guimond	Holland
Hubbard	Julian
Kadis	Karetak-Lindell
Karygiannis	Keeper
Khan	Kotto
Laforest	Laframboise
Lapierre	Lavallée
Layton	LeBlanc
Lee	Lemay
Lessard	Lévesque
Lussier	MacAulay
Malhi	Malo
Maloney	Marleau
Marston	Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Masse	Mathysen
Matthews	McCallum
McDonough	McGuinty
McGuire	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
McTeague	Ménard (Hochelaga)
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)	Merasty
Minna	Mourani
Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)	Murphy (Charlottetown)
Nadeau	Nash
Neville	Ouellet
Pacetti	Paquette
Patry	Pearson
Perron	Peterson
Picard	Plamondon
Priddy	Proulx
Ratansi	Redman
Regan	Robillard
Rodriguez	Rota
Roy	Russell
Savage	Savoie



Scarpaleggia  
Siksay  
Simms  
St-Hilaire  
St. Denis  
Stoffer  
Szabo  
Temelkovski  
Basques)  
Tonks  
Valley  
Wappel  
Wilfert  
Wrzesnewskyj

Sgro  
Simard  
St-Cyr  
St. Amand  
Steckle  
Stronach  
Telegdi  
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les

Turner  
Vincent  
Wasylcia-Leis  
Wilson  
Zed- — 164

## NAYS

### Members

Abbott  
Albrecht  
Allison  
Anders  
Baird  
Benoit  
Bezan  
Blaney  
Breitkreuz  
Brown (Barrie)  
Calkins  
Cannon (Pontiac)  
Casey  
Chong  
Davidson  
Del Mastro  
Doyle  
Emerson  
Fast  
Fitzpatrick  
Fletcher  
Gallant  
Goodyear  
Grewal  
Hanger  
Harris  
Hawn  
Hiebert  
Hinton  
Jean  
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)  
Komarnicki  
Lake  
Lemieux  
Lunn  
MacKay (Central Nova)  
Manning  
Mayes  
Merrifield  
Mills  
Moore (Fundy Royal)  
Norlock  
Obhrai  
Paradis  
Poilievre  
Preston  
Reid  
Ritz  
Schellenberger  
Skelton  
Solberg  
Stanton  
Strahl  
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)  
Tilson  
Trost  
Van Kesteren  
Vellacott  
Wallace  
Warkentin  
Williams

Ablonczy  
Allen  
Ambrose  
Anderson  
Batters  
Bernier  
Blackburn  
Boucher  
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)  
Bruinooge  
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)  
Carrie  
Casson  
Clement  
Day  
Devolin  
Dykstra  
Epp  
Finley  
Flaherty  
Galipeau  
Goldring  
Gourde  
Guergis  
Harper  
Harvey  
Hearn  
Hill  
Jaffer  
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)  
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)  
Krampp (Prince Edward—Hastings)  
Lauzon  
Lukiwski  
Lunney  
MacKenzie  
Mark  
Menzies  
Miller  
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)  
Nicholson  
O'Connor  
Oda  
Petit  
Prentice  
Rajotte  
Richardson  
Scheer  
Shipley  
Smith  
Sorenson  
Storseth  
Sweet  
Thompson (Wild Rose)  
Toews  
Tweed  
Van Loan  
Verner  
Warawa  
Watson  
Yelich- — 122

## Routine Proceedings

### PAIRED

#### Members

Cummins  
Lalonde  
Duceppe  
Pallister- — 4

**The Speaker:** I declare the motion carried.

### AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

**The Speaker:** The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion for concurrence in the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food.

• (1525)

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

### (Division No. 96)

### YEAS

#### Members

Alghabra  
Angus  
Atamanenko  
Bains  
Beaumier  
Bell (North Vancouver)  
Bennett  
Bevington  
Black  
Bonin  
Boshcoff  
Bourgeois  
Brown (Oakville)  
Byrne  
Carrier  
Charlton  
Christopherson  
Comartin  
Cotler  
Crowder  
Cullen (Etobicoke North)  
D'Amours  
DeBellefeuille  
Deschamps  
Dhaliwal  
Dion  
Dryden  
Eyking  
Folco  
Fry  
Gauthier  
Godin  
Graham  
Guarnieri  
Guimond  
Hubbard  
Kadis  
Karygiannis  
Khan  
Laforest  
Lapierre  
Layton  
Lee  
Lessard  
Lussier  
Malhi  
Maloney  
Marleau  
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)  
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)  
Mathysen  
McCallum  
McGuire  
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)  
Ménard (Hochelega)  
Merasty  
André  
Asselin  
Bagnell  
Barbot  
Bell (Vancouver Island North)  
Bellavance  
Bevilacqua  
Bigras  
Blais  
Bonsant  
Bouchard  
Brisson  
Brunelle  
Cardin  
Chan  
Chow  
Coderre  
Comuzzi  
Crête  
Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)  
Cuzner  
Davies  
Demers  
Dewar  
Dhalla  
Dosanjh  
Easter  
Faille  
Freeman  
Gagnon  
Godfrey  
Goodale  
Gravel  
Guay  
Holland  
Julian  
Karetak-Lindell  
Keeper  
Kotto  
Laframboise  
Lavallée  
LeBlanc  
Lemay  
Lévesque  
MacAulay  
Malo  
Mark  
Marston  
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)  
Masse  
Matthews  
McDonough  
McGuire  
McTeague  
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)  
Minna

*Government Orders*

Mourani	Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Murphy (Charlottetown)	Nadeau
Nash	Neville
Ouellet	Pacetti
Paquette	Patry
Pearson	Perron
Peterson	Picard
Plamondon	Priddy
Proulx	Ratansi
Redman	Regan
Robillard	Rodriguez
Rota	Roy
Russell	Savage
Savoie	Scarpaleggia
Sgro	Siksay
Simard	Simms
St-Cyr	St-Hilaire
St. Amand	St. Denis
Steckle	Stoffer
Stronach	Szabo
Telegdi	Temelkovski
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)	
Tonks	
Turner	Valley
Vincent	Wappel
Wasylcyia-Leis	Wilfert
Wilson	Wrzesnewskyj
Zed — 165	

## NAYS

## Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Albrecht	Allen
Allison	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Baird	Batters
Benoit	Bernier
Bezan	Blackburn
Blaney	Boucher
Breitkreuz	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooog
Calkins	Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Cannon (Pontiac)	Carrie
Casey	Casson
Chong	Clement
Davidson	Day
Del Mastro	Devolin
Doyle	Dykstra
Emerson	Epp
Fast	Finley
Fitzpatrick	Flaherty
Fletcher	Galipeau
Gallant	Goldring
Goodyear	Gourde
Grewal	Guergis
Hanger	Harper
Harris	Harvey
Hawn	Hearn
Hiebert	Hill
Hinton	Jaffer
Jean	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lake	Lauzon
Lemieux	Lukiwski
Lunn	Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Manning	Mayes
Menzies	Merrifield
Miller	Mills
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	
Nicholson	Norlock
O'Connor	Obhrai
Oda	Paradis
Petit	Poilievre
Prentice	Preston
Rajotte	Reid
Richardson	Ritz
Scheer	Schellenberger
Shipleay	Skelton
Smith	Solberg

Sorenson	Stanton
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Thompson (Wild Rose)	Tilson
Toews	Trost
Tweed	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vellacott
Verner	Wallace
Warawa	Warkentin
Watson	Williams
Yelich — 121	

## PAIRED

## Members

Cummins	Duceppe
Lalonde	Pallister — 4

**The Speaker:** I declare the motion carried.

[*English*]

I wish to inform the House that because of the deferred recorded divisions, government orders will be extended by 24 minutes.

\* \* \*

● (1530)

## ROYAL ASSENT

**The Speaker:** Order, please. I have the honour to inform the House that a communication has been received as follows:

Government House  
Ottawa

December 12, 2006

Mr. Speaker:

I have the honour to inform you that the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean, Governor General of Canada, will proceed to the Senate chamber today, the 12th day of December, 2006, at 5:15 p.m., for the purpose of giving royal assent to certain bills of law.

Yours sincerely,

Sheila-Marie Cook,  
Secretary to the Governor General

\* \* \*

## MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

**The Speaker:** I have the honour to inform the House that a message has been received from the Senate informing this House that the Senate has passed a bill, to which the concurrence of this House is desired.

## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

## PREBUDGET CONSULTATIONS

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

**The Speaker:** Before question period, the hon. member for Markham—Unionville had the floor and he will now be recognized so he may resume his remarks.

**Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as I said before question period, I had three themes concerning the government's fiscal and economic policy and the first one, which I have already completed, concerned its meanspirited nature.

*Government Orders*

The second theme, which I will mention now, concerns what could be characterized as a deceptive, gimmicky or perhaps sometimes bordering on dishonest approach to economic and fiscal matters.

We all know in this House, for example, that the government raised the income tax at the lowest rate for Canadians, even though for some reason it persists in characterizing that as an income tax cut. We all know that it blatantly broke its promise not to tax income trusts, resulting in a \$30 billion meltdown of the hard-earned savings of Canadians.

Let me turn now to the fiscal update. My text for the more recent cases of gimmicky behaviour comes from an article that appeared in the press only today by one John Williamson, president of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. Mr. Williamson, generally speaking, is no great friend of Liberals, at least when we were in government. He tends to be on the small "c" conservative side. His article characterizes the gimmicky approach by the government quite well. The article is entitled "Canada's Minister of Gimmick". If anyone has a doubt, the minister of gimmicks is the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Williamson gives three examples of why the Minister of Finance is the minister of gimmicks: first, gimmicky behaviour on net debt; second, gimmicky behaviour on the so-called automatic income tax reductions; and third, deceptive behaviour on control over government spending.

On the net debt issue, as I said to the finance minister in committee, if we have a debt of \$480 billion and we pay down \$3 billion a year, one does not have to be Sir Isaac Newton to figure out that it will take 160 years to pay down that debt. By throwing out some arcane statistic, the minister seeks to deceive the Canadian public into thinking that he is doing more than he really is. John Williamson refers to this as "phantom debt relief" and "a political gimmick".

In the second case mentioned by Mr. Williamson:

The proposal to pay off \$3-billion in debt each year will save taxpayers approximately 10 bucks annually — a trivial amount.

Again we have a gimmick. Much is made of this automatic reduction in income tax as the debt is paid down. I am not saying that is a bad thing but, as John Williamson, president of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, points out, it amounts to 10 bucks a year, a trivial amount and not all that the finance minister would trumpet it to be.

The third and final point mentioned in this article, and I quote Mr. Williamson here again, is that the policy "to keep spending under control" is "a policy already in tatters". He goes on to say:

But the ink on the update wasn't even dry and the Conservatives already betrayed the commitment to keep spending "below the growth of nominal GDP".

This is supposed to be the low spending, frugal government but what did it say in its first fiscal update? it projected an expenditure increase of 7.1% in 2006-07. That is a rate significantly and substantially in excess of the growth rate of nominal GDP, thereby breaking this other promise about keeping government spending growing at a slower rate than the economy.

In addition to the meanspiritedness, I would emphasize the gimmicks or the lack of honesty, whether we are talking about an income tax rate that is in fact going up and the government says that it is going down, the huge broken promise on income trusts, or this gimmicky behaviour that tries to deceive Canadians on the subject of net debt income tax and the control of government debt.

● (1535)

Having dealt with meanspiritedness and deceptiveness, my third theme would be the lack of productivity. On this point I would suggest that the government talks a good game on productivity, prosperity and competitiveness, all those good words, but its actions do not correspond with its words. I will give two primary examples of that point.

First, if a government really cared about Canada's productivity and competitiveness, the last thing in the world it would ever do is cut the GST. Yes, put money in the pockets of Canadians, but do it in a way that enhances productivity, prosperity, investment and savings, not through reducing consumption taxes. I do not think there is an economist on the planet, with the exception of the Prime Minister, who would disagree with this statement.

It is not a trivial sum of money. It would cost \$12 billion a year if the government were to cut two points off the GST and \$60 billion over five years. That is a huge chunk of the government's margin for manoeuvre over the last five years. All of that \$60 billion over five years would be committed to something that does absolutely nothing for Canada's productivity and competitiveness. The money could still have been put into people's pockets through income tax or other measures that would have increased people's spending power and, at the same time, enhance the productivity and prosperity of the nation.

The second reason why the government's words ring hollow is that not only has it given the worst possible tax cut from the standpoint of productivity, but it has cut all the previous government's investments in those things that really matter for productivity and competitiveness, things like innovation, research and education. The \$7.4 billion in cuts, which the government chose not to identify, were mentioned in question period today. The government clearly has cut in areas of maximum impact for the productivity, prosperity and competitiveness of the nation, things such as access to post-secondary education, research and innovation, all of which are keys to Canada's future prosperity.

The Conservatives are totally out to lunch on the productivity and longer term prosperity of our country, both on the tax side where they chose to make the consumption tax cut the least conducive to productivity of any possible tax cut, and on the investment side where they slashed critical investments in post-secondary education and innovation.

All in all, I am sad to say that the government receives a high grade on meanspiritedness, deceptive behaviour and on the lack of clear focus on the productivity and growth of our country. I am pleased that these points were made very well by the hundreds of Canadians we heard from across the country in the business of the finance committee. Once again, I thank all of those Canadians for taking the time to visit us.

*Government Orders*

I am also pleased that we on the opposition side of the House were able to work together to overcome, at least in part, the mean-spiritedness, the deception and the lack of productivity of the government. We, as the majority in the House of Commons, were able to come together on many motions involving the GST, investments in post-secondary education and innovation, as well as reinstating the meanspirited cuts that the government has imposed on Canadians.

• (1540)

**Ms. Diane Ablonczy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I read a quote this week stating that what politics has become is both sides trying to demonstrate that the other is unfit to govern. I thought of this when I listened to the member's speech because the measures that the government has taken in the plan it has put forward in Advantage Canada are common sense. It has been widely recognized as being a very sound budget for Canada. It has been given high marks and yet we see the Liberal Party opposite doing nothing but mischaracterizing it and using negative buzzwords to describe it.

I wonder if the member could tell the House if there is anything in the budget and in the government's plan that he approves of and thinks would be good for Canada. It would be good to have a little balance from the opposite side.

**Hon. John McCallum:** Mr. Speaker, usually I am quicker off my feet, but that is a really difficult question. Can I think of anything at all in those hundreds of words and thousands of pages that I think is good for the country? It beats me.

**Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member's speech with great interest. I found it quite remarkable that he came away from the same hearings that I did with a very different take. I speak of the Retail Council of Canada that specifically remarked that the GST cut was responsible for the single largest increase in real disposable income in 15 years. My goodness, how could he come away from that and think that this was not good for Canada?

I find it remarkable that he speaks of being meanspirited, yet he is from the government that cut \$26 billion from health care and education and now wants to pretend it did not happen. That was meanspirited.

I find it absolutely remarkable that following the Liberals' shameful record of spending increases of 14.4% in 2004-05 he would stand before this House and suggest that we are being irresponsible in spending.

Perhaps the member might want to talk about why his government campaigned in 1993 to axe the GST entirely and now thinks that by cutting it by one percentage point we are somehow working against productivity. I would love to hear that explanation.

**Hon. John McCallum:** Mr. Speaker, actually the hon. member reminds me of an important development that I had forgotten to mention when he talked about the GST. It is not terribly surprising that retailers like a low GST, is it. They are retailers after all. But every economist who we heard, the IMF, the OECD, all of the experts agree that the GST cut does nothing for productivity.

The hon. member and his colleagues may remember that when we were in several cities in the country, St. John's, Vancouver and others, I did an informal poll of our witnesses. I asked the question of all of our witnesses, "Do you agree with the government that it is a good idea to proceed with the cut in GST from 6% to 5%, or can you think of other things you would rather do with this money?"

I remember the witnesses in both Vancouver and St. John's were particularly perceptive because to a man, to a woman, they voted unanimously that the GST cut was a bad idea, that there were far better uses for the money. In the other places, I do not remember a single person defending the GST cut, but there were others who, not wishing to go against the government, were agnostic on the subject. Certainly on both coasts there was unanimous condemnation of the second cut to the GST, as compared with far more productive uses to which that money could be put.

• (1545)

**Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to ask a question of my colleague who sat on the finance committee with me. During his presentation he talked about honesty, which I thought was very interesting.

My question is very simple. I looked at what the Liberals have added in terms of their supplementary submission. We agree on a number of the 45 or so things that are in there in terms of recommendations that we had supplementary, but honestly, I do not think you were planning on supporting this budget no matter what recommendations were coming from here. Based on what you said in your speech, you are opposed, period.

If the finance minister takes on some of the Liberal dissenting opinion, how many of those before you support the next Conservative budget, or were you ever going to support a Conservative—

**The Speaker:** Order. The hon. member for Burlington knows he has to address his remarks to the Chair and not to the hon. member for Markham—Unionville, who now has the floor.

**Hon. John McCallum:** Mr. Speaker, I guess it is a fair statement that the more of those wise Liberal recommendations the government chooses to accept, the less likely it is that we would vote against the budget.

This is a very long, steep hill that the government has to climb, because having pointed out that the budget and the subsequent fiscal update are not only meanspirited, not only deceptive, they are actually counter to the need for Canadian economic growth and prosperity, productivity and competitiveness. It would take a really radical change in his whole philosophy, I think, for the finance minister to produce a budget that would likely be acceptable to our side, but I can say in all honesty that the more he goes along with the Liberal recommendations, the more likely it is that we might support the budget.

**Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the member may be able to assist the House in understanding what latitude the government has in terms of making changes which affect the fiscal position of the nation.

*Government Orders*

For instance, allowing pension income splitting will, as the member knows, benefit only high income earning seniors who make over \$35,600 a year. It provides no benefit to those who make less or have no partner. All of a sudden we are changing the balance in terms of the progressive nature of the income tax system by making major adjustments without even going through the budget process.

I wonder if the member could advise Canadians how dangerous it is to make significant decisions outside the purview of the budget process.

**Hon. John McCallum:** Mr. Speaker, that is a perceptive comment by my hon. colleague.

One gets the impression that the government does tend to make policy on the fly, and I do not think it is limited to economic policy. My colleague raised a very good example. It seems the Prime Minister likes to make his policy literally on the fly, that is, when talking to reporters in airplanes. One thinks of his rather amateur approach on China where he ignored all professional advice, or his rather startling statements on the Middle East over the course of the summer.

It seems to me that my hon. colleague has chosen a very good example in the financial domain but one could look in many, many other areas and would find a somewhat amateurish policy on the fly that has become a typical characteristic of the government in many different areas.

• (1550)

**Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, during a meeting on the budget process there was a discussion on what was happening with the GST cut in the tourism area. The hon. member was the minister of revenue a number of years ago. The question was asked, when did the department know about the problems with that program. Sure enough, the member admitted that he was the minister of revenue at the time when he knew about it.

When he was minister why did he not inform those directly affected that there was a problem with that program and make a move to fix it or get rid of it?

**Hon. John McCallum:** Mr. Speaker, I would be happy to talk to the member afterward but I am at a loss to understand his point.

It is true when I was minister of national revenue as I recall the department proposed that we abandon the program that would provide a GST rebate to foreign visitors and I said no at the time. I only wish the government had been as wise because we heard from all of these witnesses from the tourism industry about the high economic cost that the government decision had imposed on it, an industry suffering from many other problems, such as the high value of the dollar.

I was very pleased to maintain that program because it was effective and it was working. It was instrumental in bringing package groups for conventions and things of that nature. We heard that from many witnesses from the tourism industry, so I am not quite sure what the member is talking about.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I believe the debate we are having is extremely important. The indications we must give to the Minister of Finance and to the government as far as

the next budget is concerned are particularly important in a minority government situation. For the Liberals and the New Democrats there are a certain number of things that are essential. The same is true for the Bloc Québécois.

I want to first point out that we were extremely disappointed by the general direction of the report submitted by the Standing Committee on Finance. We certainly agree with some of the recommendations. However, in our opinion, others could have been better worded. And there are others still with which we completely disagree.

Two things are particularly disappointing. The first is the lack of willingness by the members of the Standing Committee on Finance, from all parties, to respect the constitutional jurisdictions of the provinces and the Canadian Constitution. That has always struck me ever since I arrived here in 2000. It would seem that the only people who have read Canada's Constitution are the members of the Bloc Québécois. The only people who want to respect the jurisdictions under the Canadian Constitution, are the members of the Bloc Québécois. I think we are the last representatives of this agreement reached in 1867 between two nations around the creation of Confederation. Apparently, across Canada and in the other political parties, there is no willingness to respect the constitutional jurisdictions of the provinces.

Over the years—particularly since the second world war—the government has taken a series of initiatives that interfere in these jurisdictions. It has used a taxation power it claimed during the two world wars. It has also refused to give back the part of the tax base it should return to the provinces to allow them to assume their responsibilities preferring to implement transfer programs for health, post-secondary education and social programs and a certain number of other programs affecting areas that clearly come under the jurisdiction of the provinces and Quebec.

The members of the committee thus ignored the Bloc's and Quebec's desire for respect for the province's jurisdictions. This was the Bloc's first major disappointment with the committee report.

The second great disappointment was the blatant refusal to recommend to the Minister of Finance, to the Prime Minister and to the government any specific measure to resolve the fiscal imbalance. It remains a matter of some importance for the Conservatives. I remind them once again, as I have in committee, that on December 19, in Quebec City—almost a year ago, now—the Prime Minister made a commitment during the election campaign to resolve the fiscal imbalance. It is already a step in the right direction to acknowledge it. The federal Liberals have a hard time doing so. It seems that a resolution was passed in this regard at their convention. However, at the end of the convention, their new leader contended still that the fiscal imbalance was a myth.

It is a good thing to recognize the fiscal imbalance, but it is a better thing to propose solutions to resolving it than to simply just acknowledge its existence. The members of the committee, with the exception of the Bloc members, refused to propose avenues for a solution to the Minister of Finance. I point out, and cannot say so enough before the budget is tabled, that our support for the budget is conditional upon a resolution of the fiscal imbalance.

*Government Orders*

As I have said and will say again, we do not expect everything to be resolved in the next budget. We do, however, expect that the people of Quebec will at least know whether the Prime Minister and the Conservative Party have honoured the promise made last December 19, reiterated in the throne speech and reaffirmed in the most recent budget. Next February or March probably, when the next budget is tabled, we will know the solutions proposed by the Conservative government. Once again, we are not expecting a solution to be put in place immediately, but we expect to at least know the scope of the corrective action needed to resolve the fiscal imbalance.

• (1555)

We have made known our estimates, which come to approximately \$12 billion for the provinces overall and \$3.9 billion for Quebec specifically. We want to know how large a correction the government is going to make.

As well, a schedule for making this correction needs to be agreed on. We have proposed that, within three years, the government correct the fiscal imbalance to the tune of \$12 billion for the provinces overall and \$3.9 billion for Quebec. This would restore Canada's fiscal balance.

We also want to know the government's timetable and the measures it will take to correct the fiscal imbalance and inject the equivalent of \$12 billion into the transfers to the provinces and Quebec.

We have made proposals. My colleague from Jeanne-Le Ber and I presented these solutions in committee. Unfortunately, they were rejected. Sometimes, it was strange, disturbing and distressing to see the committee reject, for example, solutions pertaining to transfers for social programs and post-secondary education, proposals that meet with approval across Canada from rectors of universities, professors' associations and unions and students' associations. The same figures came up in Halifax, in western Canada, in Toronto and in Quebec City.

We are the only ones who made this proposal, and all the other parties except the NDP voted against this recommendation, which represents part of the solution to the fiscal imbalance. It is not the whole solution, but it is part of the solution and it meets with approval across Canada. In this case, the Bloc Québécois was the only party that defended the interests of students, not only in Quebec but across Canada. The Bloc Québécois was the only party that defended the interests of university professors, not only in Quebec but across Canada. The Bloc Québécois was the only party that listened to rectors, not only from Quebec, but from across Canada.

I am astonished that there is a consensus throughout the university and post-secondary system—including the colleges—and yet it is being ignored. There is a consensus across Canada, including in Quebec, but the representatives of the party in power and the Liberal Party of Canada are not paying any attention to it.

For these two reasons, we were unable to support the general direction of the report, even though, as I mentioned, it contains some extremely interesting proposals. I will come back to this.

The first thing that we found especially disappointing was the failure to respect the jurisdictions of Quebec and the provinces. This

was not in just one particular area, or it might have seemed merely inadvertent, that my colleagues forgot how the fathers of Confederation divided the areas of responsibility. One could have believed it was a small oversight or lack of historical and constitutional knowledge. This was not the case, because it occurred in all areas of jurisdiction.

Consider education. Is there any area of jurisdiction that is more exclusive to the provinces and Quebec than education? The government wanted to establish national standards, to put conditions on the transfer payments.

The government wants to create transfer payments exclusively for post-secondary education. This limits even further the choices that existed at the time of the Canada social transfer, when the provinces could decide how to balance their spending between health, post-secondary education and social programs.

We now have transfer payments for health. We therefore do not have a choice. The transfer payment must go towards health. I must say, the needs in that area are enormous.

That left post-secondary education and social programs. Thus, Quebec or any province could choose the balance that most suited its situation. However, now the government wants to introduce a transfer payment exclusively for post-secondary education and a new transfer for social programs, thus limiting the autonomy of the provinces and Quebec.

And the government goes even further. Mr. Speaker, if you read the committee's recommendations, consider recommendation number 8, at the end. It reads:

Once the Canada Post-Secondary Education Transfer has been created, the government should introduce guidelines, principles, responsibilities and accountabilities with respect to post-secondary education.

• (1600)

These are jurisdictions of Quebec and the provinces. They want to establish guidelines and, eventually of course, conditions for transfers of money under the guidelines dictated by the federal government. That is encroaching on the jurisdictions of Quebec and all the provinces and territories. That should result in an outcry from not only all the provincial and territorial governments, but also those in this Chamber who believe that we should respect the Canadian Constitution.

I will give another example, that of health. As you know, this is not the first time that there has been interference in this area. There is a recommendation dealing with mental health. Unfortunately, I cannot find it right now. What is proposed is the establishment of a Canadian mental health commission. Yet, health—whether mental health or all components of health—is a provincial jurisdiction.

Once again, these are new programs, new encroachments, new conditions for federal transfers for health. They are pushing the envelope in this area just as they are in education. However, we were able to prevent the establishment of a federal department of education, as provided for in the initial bill.

Municipalities are also touched on. The Minister of Finance mentions them in the economic statement. He wants to promote private-public partnerships. If Quebec is to have a choice, it is in the implementation of infrastructure programs. In the slate of items previously negotiated, Quebec retained control over its infrastructure programs. However, they wish to promote a formula which does not even seek to have the consensus of the Quebec public. Thus, they are interfering directly in the decisions that should be made by Quebec.

I have found Recommendation 2 which proposes the creation of a Canadian mental health commission.

They also propose the establishment of a pan-Canadian securities regulator. Recommendation 37 reads as follows:

The federal government conclude an agreement with the provincial/territorial governments on a single securities regulator no later than 31 March 2007. The regulator should begin operations no later than 30 June 2007.

The Constitution clearly states that the area of securities is a jurisdiction of the provinces and of Quebec. Furthermore, in Quebec, as you know, we have the Civil Code. How would a pan-Canadian securities commission be able to deal with this reality specific to Quebec?

As Bernard Landry said, the securities commission is so important that everyone agreed there should be two of them—one for Quebec and another for the rest of Canada. However, I also know that some other provincial governments do not want the federal government to get involved in this sector.

The government did not respect constitutional jurisdictions. We tried, quite constructively, to change the report to take into account the motion that was passed almost unanimously in this House recognizing the existence of the Quebec nation. What do they mean by a “national program”? The Quebec nation? The Canadian nation? It would have been better to clarify whether it was a federal program, a pan-Canadian program, or a program for all of the provinces. But no, this government ignored the democratic vote held in this House. As my friend Gérald Larose said, some people seem to think this is purely symbolic. Rest assured that the Bloc Québécois, along with the Quebec nation and the Government of Quebec, regardless of who is in power, will continue pushing to ensure that recognition of the Quebec nation is accompanied by specific tools to facilitate its development even within Canada.

This first aspect is extremely disappointing. The second, the fiscal imbalance, is utterly stupefying. Imagine if the only thing the committee had recommended was the last recommendation in the report. I simply must quote it because I find it so astounding. We are talking about a major issue that could potentially set off an election in the coming months. Here is what the committee produced:

Recommendation 43:

The federal government meet with the provincial/territorial governments with a view to assessing their relative fiscal capacity and the extent to which they are able to fulfill their constitutional responsibilities.

*Government Orders*

We know there is a fiscal imbalance, so we do not need to meet with the provinces to find out if there is one. We know there is. What the committee should have done was recommend action, as I said. We proposed one measure. We proposed several, but as I said before, we proposed one specific measure: increasing transfer payments for post-secondary education and social programs to bring them up to where they were in 1994-95 before the member for LaSalle—Émard started making his draconian cuts to provincial transfer payments.

• (1605)

That represents some \$5 billion for Canada as a whole—\$4.9 billion, more accurately—and \$1.2 billion for Quebec.

Then it could have easily been proposed, as the Romanow commission recommended, that a quarter of the cost of health care to the provinces and Quebec be assumed by the federal government. The current figure is 23%. A little more effort would do it. Commitments have already been made. It has not been easy, but some progress has been made in this area. In all, in order to reach 25%, it would take some \$400 million for Quebec.

Two proposals have already been made and they are far from revolutionary. The first is to roll transfer payments for post-secondary education and social programs back to their levels prior to the cuts. Then it is a matter of the federal government assuming 25% of provincial health care spending.

A third proposal was also possible. It would concern equalization payments, a highly contentious area. This subject is a matter of debate. However the Prime Minister was aware of it when he was campaigning to be Prime Minister and promised last December 19 to resolve the problem. He knew of it. Equalization must involve the ten provinces and all of their revenues.

Some want to exclude oil royalties from the calculation of equalization payments. That is totally absurd.

What is one of the sources of the disparity in fiscal capacity in Canada? It is the layers of oil and natural gas in Alberta.

Newfoundland is an interesting case. Suddenly an 11% growth rate is predicted for it this year. One of the provinces with the highest level of poverty has an 11% rate of growth. Why? Because the Hibernia platform was set up and Newfoundland is now developing a series of businesses in the industrial sector around this oil. This is therefore a significant element of disparity. Failure to take it into account is like hiding one's head in the sand.

*Government Orders*

The implementation of these recommendations was supported by the Séguin commission in Quebec and the Government of Quebec—federalist and sovereignist. The bottom line is an increase in equalization payments of some \$5 billion and of \$2.1 billion for Quebec, if the proportion it currently receives is taken into account.

We can add to that compensation for the Conservative government's unilateral decision to eliminate the national child care program, for which Quebec is receiving \$270 million this year. We therefore feel that the money was promised and must now be delivered. Perhaps the Conservative government does not want to go ahead with this plan, but it must compensate Quebec, at least, which already has its own child care network that must be adequately funded. We are talking about some \$270 million.

If we add up those four amounts—\$1.9 billion for post-secondary education and social programs, \$2.1 billion for equalization, \$400 million for health and \$270 million in compensation for the unilateral decision to eliminate the national child care program—the total is nearly \$3.9 billion.

Clearly, this sum can be easily broken down and the committee could have made recommendations based on this information, but some people chose to shut their eyes instead.

As a final point, we are very pleased that the committee recommended re-establishing the programs cut by the Conservative government on September 25, 2006. Those programs affect literacy, associations, women's groups, the social economy, support for museums and open diplomacy. This is good news.

We are also pleased with the recommendation to increase the Canada Council for the Arts budget to \$300 million. We are also glad to see that the committee recommended the reinstatement of some of the environmental programs that the Conservative government had cut or was about to cut.

I hope the Minister of Finance listened to my speech, or will at least read it, and act on the recommendations. I will not call these recommendations extremely conservative, for this could cause confusion. They are very moderate and cautious, and they allow the Bloc Québécois to support the budget. Otherwise, we might have to go into an election, and then I would wish the Conservatives good luck, in advance.

• (1610)

**Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, my colleague talked about the importance of respecting provincial jurisdictions. I completely agree, gone are the days of the federal government sticking its nose in provincial business and imposing programs without consultation or collaboration.

However, in many of his examples, it seems there was agreement with the Government of Quebec. My colleague will agree, I hope, that a country is more than the division of federal-provincial jurisdictions and that it is built on collaboration and consultation.

Something puzzles me about his comments. Given his sensitivity toward provincial jurisdictions, how does he explain his support for the softwood lumber agreement, in which the federal government is requiring the provinces to consult a foreign government, in

Washington, on truly provincial forestry policies? This puzzles me somewhat, given the Bloc's sensitiveness on this issue.

Given the comments made this afternoon, how could the members of the Bloc Québécois have supported this agreement—a very bad one at that—which gives up Canadian sovereignty in an area of provincial jurisdiction?

**Mr. Pierre Paquette:** Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois never said that the softwood lumber agreement was a good deal. In fact, it contains a great many weaknesses. Moreover, when I was the international trade critic, I had written to the Minister of International Trade to suggest that a number of things be corrected.

However, the people in the industry and the Government of Quebec have asked us to support the agreement because they are hamstrung because of the countervailing duties that are currently in American hands. Sure, we can win a decisive victory in a few months, but if our companies are closed and our jobs are gone forever, the victory will be hollow. An agreement can be renegotiated. I worked in organized labour for a long time. Sometimes, you get a collective agreement that you are not very proud of, so you make up for it in the next round of negotiations. That is what we are hoping for in the case of the softwood lumber agreement. What we want is a return to free trade.

I would like to take this opportunity to respond to something the member said. When the federal government provides financial support for the provinces in their jurisdictions, that is the best illustration of fiscal imbalance, in my view. If the federal government has money not only to assume its responsibilities, but also to transfer money to the provinces for their own responsibilities, then the tax room that corresponds to those transfers should be transferred to the provinces. That is what the Bloc Québécois is asking the government to do: restore transfers to the levels they were at before the cuts, then negotiate a way to transfer the tax base so that Quebec has freedom of choice in its jurisdictions. That is what we are suggesting, and that is what we are going to insist on.

We also want the federal government to limit its spending authority and allow provinces that want to opt out of a program to be fully compensated. Unfortunately, we did not find any mention of this with respect to the loans and bursaries program in the report of the Standing Committee on Finance. At least, it is not stated in that way.

• (1615)

[English]

**Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague across the way who joined us on the committee. He did a decent job in terms of representing his constituents.

My concern is this. I listened to his speech and I read what the Bloc likes to call its minority position, which contains a number of recommendations. A number of recommendations we agreed on, and they are in the main body of the report.



*Government Orders*

One thing is missing in its position. The Bloc does not attempt to tell us what it would cancel. Would it cancel the fitness tax credit or the transit tax credit? Would it roll back the GST to 7%? It has a lot of spending in its report, but it does not tell us how we can afford it without cutting back on a number of items, which, in my recollection, the Bloc supported in budget 2006.

Does the member opposite have any ideas on how the Bloc would pay for all these things it wants rolled back, including some of the cuts that were made?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Pierre Paquette:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question. On this, the Conservatives and the Bloc can come to an understanding.

The Bloc proposed a reduction in federal government operating expenditures over three years, representing \$15 billion. I passed this proposal on to the Minister of Finance.

I think the Conservatives will agree with us. We noted that operating expenditures increased on average by 8% annually in the past seven years, I believe. I am not referring to either programs or transfers to individuals or the provinces, but to bureaucracy and computers. The figure, then, is 8%. We think it is too high. There is a recommendation to reduce the spending growth rate.

Without cutting any program—especially not like what was done on September 25—without laying off anyone, only through attrition, hiring people, but at a more reasonable rate, by cutting certain outsourced professional services that could be provided by the public service, we think that, in three years, some \$15 billion could be saved.

In the most recent election, I saw that the Conservative platform proposed freeing up some \$22 billion in five years. In terms of reducing operating costs, it is perhaps not such an undertaking to come up with the manoeuvring room to resolve the fiscal imbalance. Still I would remind the member that, last year, the federal government had a surplus of \$13 billion and will this year have some \$6 billion or \$7 billion in surplus.

Therefore, by reducing operating expenditures and using the flexibility the surplus gives us, there is plenty of room to resolve the fiscal imbalance problem once and for all.

[*English*]

**Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, this is an important discussion for this place. Committee members have spent many months engaging Canadians in prebudget consultations. We have met with hundreds of individuals and organizations. On behalf of the Parliament of Canada, we have brought before the House a complete synopsis of options and views that must be taken into consideration in the budget preparation.

Canadians are watching today with a great deal of cynicism and skepticism. Based on past experience and the record of the previous Liberal government, there has hardly been an occasion when governments of the day have listened to what Canadians have said. Expectations have been raised and Canadians have invariably been disappointed. It has been the case over the last five or six budgets

under the previous Liberal government. I certainly hope it is not the case today.

Given statements made by the government and announcements delivered by the finance minister, I do not hold out great hope that the government is listening to Canadians any more than the previous government did, but we need to try. We need to remind the government what Canadians have said.

I want to give a few impressions of the hearings. However, before I do that, I want to indicate that the committee functioned well and was active. I thank all my colleagues on it, including the chair, the member for Portage—Lisgar, as well as the research staff, the clerk of the committee, the translators, the interpreters and the logistics personnel, all of whom made it possible for us to travel to many parts of the country to hear from so many Canadians.

The first impression from the hearings is one of cynicism in the face of the knowledge that the government has basically used up the surplus capacity it has had and has provided us with almost a bare cupboard. By all indications, the surplus dollars we have seen over the years will not necessarily be there in the next several years. The great surpluses that we have seen, especially for the last fiscal year, have been unceremoniously put toward the debt without due regard for balance or the concerns of Canadians.

If there was one thing the committee heard over and over from Canadians, it was that the present government and the one before it had not offered a balanced approach, and it was high time it did so. For years Canadians were told the government had to get rid of the deficit and then it would be their turn. When the deficit was eliminated through huge cuts, the Liberals said that it was not the turn of Canadians yet, that they had to give big corporate breaks and tax reductions to wealthy individuals. When that was done, the Liberals turned to Canadians and said that it was still not their turn, that they had to put every penny of available money toward the debt.

Then came the end of the Liberals and Canadians looked to the Conservatives with some hope, I would not say with a lot of hope, that they might be prepared to balance the equation. It is not really a radical concept. It is not a social democratic approach by any means. It is a compromise position to put some money against the debt, some money toward tax cuts and some money toward program spending.

• (1620)

Let us start to repair the damage that has been done to Canadians over the last decade or two. Let us look at the increasing gap between the rich and the poor, the increasing desperation on the part of working mothers, and the growing frustration on the part of low wage earners in this country who never seem to get ahead and never get a wage increase. They never get a raise.

*Government Orders*

That was one of the most important messages we heard right across this country, that it is time for Canadians, but instead of government actually listening to those concerns, we listened to the finance minister give his economic update in which he said the government was going to do even more in terms of getting rid of the debt and even more in terms of spending cuts.

Since my time is almost halfway up already, I want to note that I am splitting my time with the member for Victoria.

The second important message we heard from Canadians was that competitiveness is not something we deal with just in economic terms. It is not just about the bottom line for corporations. It is about how we build a society that can be competitive on a global scale in economic and human terms.

Over and over, people rejected the notion that all we had to do was reduce corporate taxes and give more tax incentives to big corporations, the trickle-down would happen, and Canadians would benefit sometime, somewhere, somehow, even though by then, by cutting so deeply into programs and using all available revenue for tax breaks for corporations, we really kill medicare, universal education, public housing, and sustainable environmental programs.

In fact, Canadians want the government to understand that the most competitive nations in the world are those that have been responsible not only in terms of fiscal planning and debt reduction, and not only in terms of a fair, progressive taxation policy, but also in terms of major public investment. The countries that do the best competitively and economically around the world are those that invest in a universal child care program, in health care, in housing, in environmental and sustainable programs, and in the most vulnerable people, in women, people with disabilities and aboriginal peoples.

There is a lesson around the world for all of us. I do not know if members on the Conservative side have heard this or if the Minister of Finance is going to ever grasp it.

That is what we have to do today: we have to make them understand that when we look at the future we have to invest in those programs that do both, programs that ensure economic prosperity but also raise the level of the human condition. We have to ensure that we address some of the most embarrassing and shameful circumstances and statistics ever faced in this country. It is absolutely unacceptable that a country as rich as Canada has the kind of homelessness and poverty that we have seen in this winter weather.

The committee heard from a homeless person. I am sure my colleagues on committee will recall him. His name is Dri. His full name is Rainer Driemeyer. He said, "Taxation is the cost of living in a civil society". He was reminding us that taxation is not bad per se, but that it must be done in a balanced context and it must ensure that we have the resources to pay for the things that we cherish as a country.

We heard from child care workers who showed us smiling faces of children who had been through the most progressive child care facilities anywhere in the world and who want to see that kind of program encouraged and continued.

We heard from Canadians who felt that we have what it takes. We have the resources. We have the knowledge. We have the abilities.

We just need a government that is willing to let us put those talents to the use of this great country and for the future of our children.

• (1625)

[*Translation*]

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau):** It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan, Aboriginal Affairs; the member for Madawaska—Restigouche, Regional Economic Development of Canada; the member for Hamilton Mountain, Pensions.

• (1630)

[*English*]

**Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments from my fellow member on the committee, the member from the New Democrats who came to most of the meetings. I appreciate her work on the committee while we were travelling the country.

I have two questions for her. First, just about everyone who came to committee said that if we spend more we will make more. Based on that theory, we could spend a zillion dollars and make a zillion dollars. The member talked about that a little. I want to know if she actually agrees with that concept.

Second, we are spending \$13.2 billion to pay down debt. We are trying to get this country's debt down. She seemed to be opposed at the time. Would she prefer that the taxpayer paid interest on debt? What is her view of what the role of interest is on debt and the role of debt in the upcoming budget? What are her party's views on that matter?

**Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from my colleague, the member for Burlington, who sits on the finance committee. I appreciated all of his participation in the committee over the last number of months as well.

In the context of the issue of spending, I think the theory is that if we spend more we will make more. No, I do not agree with that. I do not think anybody who came to the committee agreed with that.

In fact, the opposite was said. People said that when the government keeps spending on things like tax breaks for corporations they do not necessarily see the benefit. Over and over, people reported to us that over the last number of years we have seen millions of dollars in tax breaks for corporations and that has not resulted in increased investment.

In fact, the contrary has happened. Investment has declined as tax breaks have grown and profits have risen. Over and over again, those who thought this through said that if we are going to do anything in terms of more public spending in the form of tax breaks, then we have to apply a cost benefit analysis.

*Government Orders*

I found it very interesting to go to some of the big business folks around our table, especially the business tax reform group, and ask them if they did not think there should be some sort of a cost benefit analysis in terms of more tax breaks. Do members know what the answer was? It was no. It was a simple no, in that they said no, they do not need any accountability, and no, there does not need to be any kind of transparency, and we just need to take from the public purse and take, take, take and never give, give, give.

That is what we object to. Public spending in certain strategic areas can produce jobs, create good working conditions, deal with some very difficult social and environmental issues and actually build a better society while bringing down the debt.

Finally, let me answer the question about debt, because in fact the member and others on those benches like to present the myth that the NDP does not believe in paying down the debt. Nothing could be further from the truth. We have always said that a portion of our surplus should go against the debt. We have recommended that it be decided by Parliament, something that the Conservatives used to support when they were in opposition, but not now, and we recommend that there at least be—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau):** The hon. member for Mississauga South.

**Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am always curious when people suggest that somehow there was an option left. The year end of March 31, 2006 was over and six months later the Auditor General's report said there was a \$13.2 billion surplus.

In fact, there is no option other than to have it applied against the debt and recorded in the accounts. It does not mean that the savings from the paydown in debt are not there, but governments do have an opportunity during the fiscal period, during the year when they get progress reports, to adjust their programs to assist.

I think the member is bang on. We are talking about differences in ideology and in the view or the vision of Canada. The Conservatives seem to think that tax cuts are the solution to all problems and that people should fend for themselves. The literacy cuts, the women's programs cuts and the whole range of them all affect people.

Does the member feel that we need to call to Canadians more strongly to give the government a signal that it is not acceptable to leave Canadians who are unable to help themselves to fend for themselves?

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau):** The hon. member has only 20 seconds for a response.

**Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis:** First, Mr. Speaker, there is an option to putting all surplus dollars against the debt, and that is honest and open reporting, accounting and forecasting, something the Liberals refused to do and which led to \$80 billion over the last five budgets going against the debt because they would not report to—

• (1635)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau):** Resuming debate, the hon. member for Victoria.

**Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Winnipeg for sharing her time with me and for her work on the committee.

I understand from the records that there were over 300 witnesses. One of the issues that seems to have taken up a lot of time in discussion was how to increase Canada's competitiveness in the world. The overwhelming and predominant message from the presenters was that we should look at competitiveness from a broad perspective.

The committee was told that if it were serious about meeting the very real challenge of keeping Canada competitive in the world economy, it must not take a superficial approach by simply equating economic competitiveness with lower corporate taxes and higher profits. It involves wise economic stewardship, with a strong emphasis on investing in people, together with targeted industrial investment, for example, and investment in the environment.

During the week of November 13, I held a series of meetings in Victoria with my constituents, university officials, elected officials and business leaders, in addition to an open town hall meeting that was attended by a large number of citizens. During these meetings, I collected some key recommendations.

The people of Victoria want overwhelmingly what the rest of Canadians want. They do not want the federal government to withdraw from social policy and wise environmental stewardship. Their recommendations and suggestions included: investment in housing options to face the shameful issue of homelessness in cities across Canada; investment in adult literacy programs; reducing post-secondary education student debt; increasing funding for basic research; and putting in place effective programs to tackle climate change.

There were of course specific suggestions, and if I have time I would like to talk about those as well, but in the end, that is what making Canada more competitive really means. That is what our economy should be for: enhancing the quality of life for all Canadians. That is what Victorians want from their federal government.

I would like to start talking about the economy and in particular the role that Canada's human capital plays in keeping our economy strong and sustainable.

Two recent polls show Canadians' strong preference for greater federal investment in post-secondary education. One poll conducted by Decima Research for the Canadian Association of University Teachers and the Canadian Federation of Students reported that 56% of those surveyed preferred reducing tuition fees to the Conservatives' promise to cut the GST by a further one per cent.

Canadians know that tax cuts do not lower tuition and they do not hire new faculty or create new apprenticeships. They understand that focusing only on tax cuts actually impairs the creation of the human capital that makes our economy run. Canadians know that our human capital requires investment.

*Government Orders*

The second poll released last week by the Canadian Council on Learning showed that 75% of Canadians believe the government does not spend enough on post-secondary education. And they are right. Since the start of the Mulroney years, federal transfers for post-secondary education have plummeted as a percentage of GDP.

Tax cuts do not magically equip Canadians with the skills and knowledge they need to be competitive. The poll done coincided with the Canadian Council on Learning report which concluded that “Canada lacks mechanisms at the national level to ensure coherence, coordination and effectiveness on key priorities, such as quality, access, mobility and responsiveness”.

The council cites a number of countries in Europe that have begun setting national standards dealing with post-secondary funding: how much we want to spend as a country, class size, library holdings, teaching credentials, et cetera.

Canada has neglected to set any such standards. We just do not have a vision for post-secondary education. We are simply out of sync.

● (1640)

In Australia and the United States, individual states, like Canada, regulate higher learning. Yet that has not stopped their federal governments from creating national post-secondary watchdog agencies.

We now know that 70% of jobs require post-secondary education or training and only 44% of Canadians have this much formal schooling. The CEO of the Canadian Council on Learning, Paul Cappon, said, “We can hardly ask the rest of the world to give us a decade to work out our jurisdictional difficulties”.

Canada now ranks 15th among western industrialized countries in spending on research and development as a percentage, for example, of gross domestic product. The post-secondary education sector is still largely designed to respond to the needs of younger learners.

The lifelong learning requirements of many adults are not adequately addressed. Many barriers still exist that make it very difficult for workers to upgrade their skills or attend college or university. The issue of lifelong learning means concrete support and incentives for adult learners, whether in colleges, universities or in the workplace.

Added to the lack of a lifelong learning strategy in the Conservative program is a lack of a skills agenda in Canada. The Conservatives idea of a skills agenda is a set of tax credits for apprentice tools. The skills agenda must facilitate transition from suffering sectors to booming ones. Transition skills training is key, preferably to greener industries. As my colleague mentioned earlier, cut the huge tax cuts, for example, to the oil and gas sector, which is booming, in favour of other sectors that we would like to encourage.

We need the federal government to play an active role in investing in lifelong learning to help workers overcome the barriers to upgrading their skills. We greatly need sector partnerships. Conservatives cut the workplace partners panel, the only forum for business and labour collaboration around workplace training planning.

There are many issues to address. Clearly, the economic benefit of a strong system of learning is understood by Canadians. It is building our human capital, our skills and our knowledge that improves our standard of living, not single minded tax cuts.

I would also like to address the issue of the importance of basic research and the need to invest in research, in the sciences and humanities. Research councils are losing ground compared to inflation, including Canada research chairs. SSHRC, for example, has lower funding than others. Proportionately the amount it gives, I believe, is 14%, by comparison. Social sciences and humanity students are 67% of undergraduate students and 69% of graduate students in Canada.

Relying solely on commercialized research misses the point of research and progress in the public interest. Commercialized research is largely short term. Marketable results are what is important.

There are important research projects that do have commercial implications or that have very long terms, which the government seems to have forgotten. For example, research on climate change at the University of Victoria has not been funded in three years. There has been some federal funding in the past for research projects of national and international importance called the NEPTUNE project, the northeast Pacific time theories undersea network experiments, and VENUS project, the Victoria experimental network under the sea, both at the University of Victoria. They are very important projects that have implications for knowledge, the knowledge that we may gain about what is happening in our oceans, and also development, giving opportunities to scientists and young students in the sciences.

● (1645)

Finally, we need to speak for urban agenda. We need a real deal for cities instead of an improvised ad hoc approach that weakens the extraordinary efforts of local citizens and weakens what cities are trying to achieve in terms of infrastructure.

**Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member for Victoria with interest. The points she makes are not entirely correct and the picture is far more nuance than the one she has let on in debate.

*Government Orders*

There is no doubt that in the mid-1990s the previous government of the day cut significantly the Canada health and social transfer, which is used by provinces to deliver post-secondary education and health care. Under the Constitution, the provinces have primary responsibility for the delivery of post-secondary education and training. There is no doubt that those cuts in the mid-1990s had a significant impact on the delivery of post-secondary education and training in Canada.

It is also the case that in recent years the transfer, which has now been split into two separate transfers, has been partially restored. On the health care side, it is the government's view that the health care transfer has been fully restored to pre-1995 levels. It is also our view that significant steps have been taken to restore funding for post-secondary education and training in the form of the Canada social transfer and in the form of the myriad of tax credits that have been put in place in recent years so we can invest in human capital and in the knowledge based economy.

While transfers for post-secondary education have not yet been fully restored, they have been significantly restored to pre-1995 levels. That is why our government has committed to coming forward with a long term framework for post-secondary education and training to be delivered in the budget of next year.

The member should wait for that budget and support it. It will contain the new long term framework, which will provide significant support through various mechanisms for Canada's education across the country so we can have a competitive economy and an able and skilled workforce.

**Ms. Denise Savoie:** Mr. Speaker, I look forward to reading the government framework because its economic update did not give a hint that it would look very much at the human capital side or at the environmental side. "Advantage Canada" seems to be focused almost entirely on tax advantages.

However, it is very difficult to identify exactly how much will go to provincial governments in terms of the transfer for post-secondary education. Even the minister in the House made a mistake on how much money would be going to the provinces. Because the transfer is not specifically a targeted transfer to education, it is not clearly identifiable.

**Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for focusing her attention on post-secondary education. It is difficult to talk about all aspects that would be dealt with in the prebudget consultations.

I can recall doing some work on the need for post-secondary education. It showed that the unemployment rate for people who dropped out of high school was somewhere 17%. For people who had high school education, the rate was about 11.2%. For people who had some post-secondary education, it was down below 10%. For people who had a post-secondary degree or some other skills training, the unemployment rate was probably in the range of about 3% to 5%. It makes some economic sense. This is a knowledge based economy.

The member is also quite right. Even though we have the CHST, that simply for the purpose of calculation. There is no guarantee that the money is actually going into post-secondary education.

Would the member agree that we need to sit down with the provinces to make absolutely sure that when there is an investment from the federal level in post-secondary education, it indeed hits its targets squarely?

• (1650)

**Ms. Denise Savoie:** Mr. Speaker, any targeted transfer or increased funding for education should go to provinces in discussion with the provinces. We should develop a common vision, a Canadian vision for what we want to achieve in access and quality of education. Absolutely a targeted transfer with an agreed upon—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau):** Resuming debate, the hon. member for St. Catharines.

**Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am grateful to have time to spend time this afternoon speaking about our submission to the 2007 budget.

I want to thank the members from all parties, who put a lot of work and effort into moving from one side of the country to the other. I want to thank, in particular, the members for Peterborough and Burlington for their outstanding work. I also want to thank the parliamentary secretary who did a great job on our behalf.

I also want to thank the 417 witnesses who presented 403 briefs on the theme of Canada's place in a competitive world.

We spent four weeks in Ottawa. We spent two weeks travelling from coast to coast. We held prebudget consultations in four communities in four provinces, which had never happened before: Whitehorse, Yukon; in Fort McMurray, Alberta; in St. John's, Newfoundland; and Portage la Prairie, Manitoba.

There was a very specific purpose for these budget consultations. The witnesses were asked to provide their input on four specific questions.

The first question was, what specific federal tax or program spending measure should be implemented in the upcoming budget to ensure that our citizens were healthy, had the right skills for their own benefit and for the benefit of their employers?

The second question was, what specific federal tax and/or program spending measures should be implemented in the upcoming budget to ensure that our nation had the infrastructure required by individuals and for businesses?

The third questions was, what specific federal tax and/or program spending measures should be implemented in the upcoming budget to ensure that our businesses were competitive, both here in our country and globally?

We wanted to ensure that it was understood in the fourth question that there had to be accountability for those expenditures. The fourth question was specific as to what federal actions should be taken in order that the federal government would be able to afford the tax and/or program spending measures needed to ensure that Canada's individuals and businesses could prosper in the world in the future?

*Government Orders*

It is obvious that the prebudget consultations in large part were strong, but were built upon the foundation of the 2006 budget that provided tax relief for everyone in the country. The tax credits included the new Canada employment credit, the new deduction for tradespeople tool expenses, a complete exemption for scholarship income received in connection with enrollment at institutions, which qualify the student for the education tax credit and the new children's fitness tax credit, which in the riding of St. Catharines will provide a benefit to over 23,000 children under the age of 16.

It is not only this party and this government that supports the credit. The minister of health promotion in the province of Ontario made a presentation to the health committee. When asked about the credit, he extended congratulations to the government for implementing and putting forward this measure. The minister went on to say that he thought it was he who provided the advice to the Prime Minister to ensure it was in the platform of our government.

I had the chance to say this to him at committee. If he was so successful in convincing the Prime Minister that it was an important piece of our budget and our platform, he should be able to convince his finance minister and his leader in the province of Ontario to do likewise.

We have also doubled to \$2,000 from \$1,000 the amount of which the pension income credit is calculated. We have the new apprenticeship job creation tax credit, an increase to \$400,000 from \$300,000 of the amount that a small business can earn at a small business tax rate effective January 1, 2007. In child care, there is \$3.7 billion over two years for the universal child care benefit, which will provide all families with \$1,200 a year per child under the age of six. We will be investing in creating new child care spaces. The budget allocates \$250 million, beginning in 2007, to create real child care spaces as part of Canada's universal child care.

● (1655)

For students, we are expanding eligibility for the Canada student loans program by reducing the parental contribution required, not just students in school but students and youth who need our help to prevent them from ending up either in the justice system because of a crime they committed or, certainly, on the wrong side of where they should be.

Ideally, we need to put tools and textbooks into the hands of our young people, not guns. They need tools that will help them realize that they can grow up to lead successful and productive lives. To do that, we are investing \$20 million for communities to prevent youth crime, with a focus on making sure that they have programs and educational opportunities available for them.

Province after province that we went to and presentation after presentation that was made at committee talked about the need for affordable housing in this country, whether it be first nations, whether it be in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, whether it be in British Columbia or whether it be right here in Ontario. There was certainly a welcome response from every single organization, that made presentations about affordable housing, that this government put in its budget \$800 million for a major one time investment to increase the supply of affordable housing in our cities and our communities through a new affordable housing trust.

Transportation is one of the leading causes of pollution and greenhouse gas emissions in this country. We invested up to \$1.3 billion in Canada on public transit and infrastructure. This funding will assist in the building of the infrastructure necessary to deal with increased ridership. Increased ridership one might say. That is because effective July 1 of this year our government provided a transit rider tax incentive. This means that transit riders, who buy monthly passes, will receive almost two months of free transit rides per year. I am seeing that in my own riding.

Probably one of the best comments from any of the presentations came from Mr. Robert Paddon, vice-president, corporate and public affairs, of the Greater Vancouver Transportation Authority. After being questioned by the member for Markham—Unionville, about this exact piece of legislation, he said:

Finally, I just want to again compliment and congratulate the government for putting forward an initiative to encourage people to use public transportation.

Concerning the tax credit, we are just coming off the end of the first quarter since the tax credit was put in place. We have not finalized our numbers, but they are already recognizing, toward the end of this year, the significant increases in ridership: a 10% increase in June of this year from 2005 and a 13% increase in August.

We also have lower taxes for all Canadians and the lowest tax rate on new business investment among the group of seven countries. Under fiscal finances, we will have the elimination of Canada's total government net debt in less than a generation. That comes from "Advantage Canada", presented to the finance committee toward the end of its deliberations which made a lot of sense because it tied into everything that folks talked about from across this country, whether it was entrepreneurialism or knowledge. It related to the creation of the best educated, the most skilled, and the most flexible workforce in the world, and one of our recommendations speaks specifically to this.

With respect to infrastructure, efforts have been made to build modern and world class infrastructures in Canada through public-private partnerships in order to ensure a seamless flow of people, goods and services.

All of that, combined with all of our meetings, came with a host of recommendations that are included in the prebudget document that we will be submitting to the finance minister.

● (1700)

The Conservatives certainly do not hold a majority on the committee from a government perspective, but a number of the recommendations in this document speak very closely to the type of budget recommendations, economical and fiscally responsible, that are necessary to be pursued by the government. In fact, I have a top 5 out of the 40 some recommendations that are in the document and I want to touch on just a couple of them. For example, recommendation No. 2 states:

The federal government, in conjunction with the provincial/territorial governments, help to develop a national mental health strategy. This strategy—which should include the creation of a Canadian mental health commission—should address the mental health needs of all Canadians, but particularly those who are determined to be at higher risk.

*Government Orders*

This request has come forward time and time again, year after year. Mental health in this country is an area that we need to focus on. We listened and it is in here. Recommendation No. 15 states:

The federal government, in conjunction with the provincial/territorial governments, help to fund existing infrastructure initiatives at a level designed to reduce the public infrastructure deficit. As well, the government should make permanent a program for the sharing of gas tax revenues with municipalities.

That goes back to the budget which included \$16.5 billion for infrastructure and in particular \$1 billion for infrastructure for universities across this country. If that is not responsive, I do not know what is. Recommendation No. 30 states:

The federal government, following consultations with relevant stakeholders, make changes to the Scientific Research and Experimental Development investment tax credit with a view to ensuring high levels of private sector research and development.

There are \$40 million in this budget and the money needs to be focused where it is going to have the best use, whether that is in conjunction with universities doing the work with the private sector or with government ensuring that we are moving forward. Universities and the private sector must be capable of conducting that research with valuable outcomes, so that we can invest in the future. We know that to have a strong economy in the future we need to ensure that we are investing in the tools and research that we need down the road and we need to do it right now. Recommendation No. 35 states:

The federal government eliminate the use of tax havens in an effort to ensure that all corporations, businesses and individuals pay their fair share of taxes.

We all know the stories of the ships that fly a flag of convenience across the world. They fly flags of convenience for one simple reason: they do not have to pay taxes in the country that they necessarily do business in. All parties at the finance committee supported this recommendation. They know it is time that we move away from offshore corporate tax havens that ensure individuals do not have to pay taxes in the country they live in. That is a positive result of the work that was done by the committee. Finally, recommendation No. 41 states:

The federal government continue to pursue a balanced budget in order to avoid federal budgetary deficits. As well, the government should continue to include, in its budget planning, an annual allocation of \$3 billion for repayment of the accumulated federal deficit.

We heard from the NDP member on the committee who indicated to all of us here today that in fact we should be paying down the debt, not in the way that Conservatives believe it should be paid down, which is as quickly as possible, but the member indeed supported the finance minister's recommendations not only in his budget but in the presentation that he made at the finance committee in "Advantage Canada". In fact, the finance minister was going to commit, on behalf of the government, to pay a minimum of \$3 billion down on the debt. This was supported by all parties at the finance committee. If that is not working together, I do not know what is.

Why does this make for good government? First, it shows responsibility in terms of paying down debt, investing in our future, and investing in infrastructure, but it also speaks to accountability.

• (1705)

In about another 10 or 15 minutes, royal assent will be given to the federal accountability act. I cannot think of a better thing to do than to talk about the budget of 2007 and a number of the

recommendations that will be handed over to the finance minister just before the federal accountability act is given royal assent. The federal accountability act will ensure that we are responsible and that we are providing good government, and in doing so we are transparent and accountable. It is very simple.

The recommendations will impact on my riding. We are actually talking about a federal budget for all Canadians. These recommendations will impact on ridings like mine in terms of helping to restore integrity, ethics and accountability in the House of Commons. All of us on this side of the House campaigned on this. I campaigned on it in the city of St. Catharines during the election.

It is refreshing to say that if we are going to recommend expenditures that we be accountable. They have to fall within the framework of responsibility. Being accountable does not mean increasing budgets by 14%, having ways and means motions in November and passing three or four budgets in a single fiscal year. Being accountable means making sure that folks in communities like St. Catharines, Burlington, Peterborough, and in cities and towns in Saskatchewan know that when we are talking about a budget, we make sure we bring integrity to it. That means communities across this country get their fair share of federal spending and it is not only focused in one or two areas but benefits all communities.

There has been some discussion about the budget reduction that this government promised to do and which it has done over the last couple of months. The Liberal Party has cried hue on a number of those tough decisions that were made, but they were wise decisions. I want to quote from *The Globe and Mail* of Friday, December 1. It states:

From the opposition outcry over budget cuts to Status of Women Canada, Canadians might think the Conservatives had throttled women's aspirations for equality. That is simply incorrect...The closings come as Ottawa pares \$5-million from the agency's \$23-million annual budget over two years. It's about time...Today, it seems more like a government relic, laden with jargon from old wars. On paper, its mission is to promote gender equality, focusing on the improvement of women's economic autonomy, the elimination of systemic violence against women and children and the advancement of women's human rights.

In theory, that is exactly what all of us stand for in this House, but in practice their efforts as quoted are scattershot.

After having gone through the experience of travelling across the country, of sitting on the finance committee and hearing the input from so many good folks across this country, we actually have been able to focus this process into a focused agenda that talks about "Advantage Canada", a focused agenda that started with the budget of 2006 and will lead into the budget of 2007. It will be another great budget for the people of this country and our communities.

While the folks who sit on the opposition benches, particularly those in the Liberal Party, want to play politics about the future of our country and our budgets, we are not. There are minority reports attached to this document. The minority report that comes from the government is signed by each and every member of the committee who sits on this side of the House. The minority report from the Liberal Party is signed by no one.

*Government Orders***ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS**

● (1710)

[English]

**COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE**

## FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

**Hon. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. There have been discussions between all parties and I think you will find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, in relation to its study on the democratic development, twelve (12) members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development be authorized to travel to Washington, DC and New York, N.Y. from February 4 to 8, 2007, and that the necessary staff accompany the committee.

(Motion agreed to)

**GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

[English]

**PREBUDGET CONSULTATIONS**

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

**Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, there was one line in the speech that we should reflect upon. The member said that the budget should ensure that businesses and individuals can prosper in the future. He went on to list all the different ways in which the current government will help businesses, help people who have jobs and so on.

However, if we were to check out the speech we would see what the member said about people who live in poverty. He said nothing. We would see what the member said about people who are illiterate in our country. He said nothing. We would see what he said about people who are disabled. He said nothing.

For those most in need in our society, what we find in the member's speech and in the government's platform is that the government wants people who cannot take care of themselves to fend for themselves.

**Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to clarify what my colleague across the way has said. The impact of the reductions we have made and the opportunity to provide for Canadians who are at or below the poverty line is clear. Over 600,000 people in this country no longer pay federal tax because of this budget.

We can talk about illiteracy or we can talk about literacy. From a going forward perspective, I would rather talk about literacy and the fact that those who cannot read or write now should have the opportunity to learn how to read and write. We could talk about illiteracy where, under the previous government, in 13 years was there ever a reduction in illiteracy rates? Illiteracy rates went up year after year. We cancelled a program and reduced the program because it was about advocacy. It had nothing to do with actually getting adults learning how to read and how to write.

**Mrs. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, there was another rather interesting, albeit disturbing, line in that

speech. I heard the member refer to the Status of Women Canada as a relic. I would say that the only relic here is the relic who would fail to understand that there is still a profound need in this country.

As long as there is no national child care program, no affordable housing program and no determined action to end violence against women or to support aboriginal women, we need Status of Women.

Is the member sending a signal to members of the House that the government intends to further undermine Status of Women Canada and further demean the women of this country by preventing their equality and their seeking of equality?

● (1715)

**Mr. Rick Dykstra:** Mr. Speaker, those actually were not my words. Those were the words in the editorial written on December 1 in the *Globe and Mail*. It said that this government had taken action, not that this government would just have offices open across this country for which advocacy can take place and lobbying funded by the federal government.

If we are actually sincere to the opportunities that we need to continue with respect to equalization in this country, not just the equalization of women but the equalization of all people in this country so that we all have the same opportunity, we should not be wasting money on advocacy and lobbying. That is not what taxpayers invest their money for. They invest it for action, which is what we are doing.

**Mr. Dave Batters (Palliser, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this debate does not mean much to the Liberals because budget reports and prebudget reports are things to be ignored and the majority toss them aside. Finance ministers have already made up their minds. For the Liberals, this is all about politics and not what is best for Canadians.

The Liberal finance critic has already called for a spring election and predicted that the Liberals will vote against the next budget. He said:

If we are tied with the Conservatives without a leader, I think with a new leader and all the publicity of our convention, we should move in front after the convention and it will be good for us to have a spring election.

Those remarks were made by the member for Markham—Unionville and quoted in *The Globe and Mail* on October 19.

Why do the members opposite pay more attention to the polls than to what is good for Canadians? Why will they not wait and see what is in this budget in the spring to see how this finance minister and the Prime Minister are acting in the best interests of all Canadians before talking about a spring election?

**Mr. Rick Dykstra:** Mr. Speaker, I should mention that we spent a day in hearings in Saskatchewan and time and time again the member for Palliser's name came up, congratulating and thanking him for the advice and guidance he provided us when we were in Saskatchewan.

The question he asks is not an easy one to answer and I am thankful that I sit on this side of the House and not on the other side. The fact is that we are working for an end and for a means in the 2007 budget. It seems to me that perhaps the opposition should think a little more about the benefits of the 2007 budget rather than whether we should have an election.



**Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, hearing the member for St. Catharines speak as he did on the environment brought to mind very quickly the smog days in Ontario.

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## ROYAL ASSENT

• (1730)

[Translation]

A message was delivered by the Usher of the Black Rod as follows:

Mr. Speaker, it is the desire of Her Excellency the Governor General that all hon. members attend her immediately in the Senate chamber.

Accordingly the Speaker with the House went up to the Senate chamber.

*And being returned:*

**The Speaker:** I have the honour to inform the House that when the House went up to the Senate chamber, the Governor General was pleased to give, in Her Majesty's name, royal assent to the following bills:

Bill C-5, an act respecting the establishment of the Public Health Agency of Canada and amending certain Acts—Chapter 5.

Bill C-38, an act for granting to Her Majesty certain sums of money for the federal public administration for the financial year ending March 31, 2007—Chapter 6.

Bill C-39, an act for granting to Her Majesty certain sums of money for the federal public administration for the financial year ending March 31, 2007—Chapter 7.

Bill S-5, an act to implement conventions and protocols concluded between Canada and Finland, Mexico and Korea for the avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income—Chapter 8.

Bill C-2, an act providing for conflict of interest rules, restrictions on election financing and measures respecting administrative transparency, oversight and accountability—Chapter 9.

Bill C-34, an act to provide for jurisdiction over education on First Nation lands in British Columbia—Chapter 10.

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## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

### PREBUDGET CONSULTATIONS

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

**Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am happy to speak to this particular issue. As a former parliamentary secretary to the minister of finance, I always find these particular interventions very important. I certainly have no preconceived notions in terms of what the government may bring down.

However, I can say that I am very proud of the fact that in the past the Liberal Government of Canada was able to bring down eight consecutive budget surpluses, the longest in the history of Canada. We were the first ones to deal with paying down the debt.

When we came into government in 1993, we inherited a \$42.5 billion deficit, which means that 33¢ of every dollar that was being

### Government Orders

transferred was actually borrowed. Therefore, it was not, in my view, real money.

The Standing Committee on Finance had over 400 submissions and heard the concerns of 400 witnesses. Of course no government can respond to all 400, no matter how worthy it may be.

I hope the government will approach the budget in a balanced manner, which means dealing with debt reduction, with social spending and, obviously, with tax reduction. However, it is important that we have a balance but we cannot do it all without a clear balance in dealing with the needs of Canadians.

There were issues concerning a sustainable economy, a healthy environment, healthy communities, high quality of life, dealing with seniors and so on. I will focus on a few of those issues.

I thought it a bit ironic that the President of the Treasury Board and the Minister of Finance announced a billion dollars in spending cuts at the same time that they announced a \$13.2 billion surplus for 2005-06. They certainly cannot accuse us of leaving the cupboards bare with a \$13.2 billion surplus. I support the fact that money was put on the debt. We have a debt at the moment of about \$481 billion but, because of past Liberal governments, we paid \$82 billion on the debt, which is extremely important.

The Conservative government, as we know, has done a lot of cutting. I think that deals with the root of the problem, which is that cuts affect communities and they affect people. When we see funding cuts that are targeted at women, at aboriginals or at the need for affordable housing, those clearly have created concerns across the country.

The Conservatives always say that they are concerned about minorities. The only minority that I think they are really concerned about is the minority of people who voted for them in the 2006 election.

When we see \$45 million slashed for the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, the \$10 million elimination of support for Canadian volunteerism, the \$6 million cut for the Canadian Firearms Centre and the \$18 million cut for literacy skills, those are issues that affect the average Canadian.

As the former president of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, I am concerned about the lack of a focus on dealing with communities across the country. The fact is that it was the past Liberal government which brought forth the first national infrastructure program in 1994. It languished under the previous Conservative government for 10 years and it was the Liberal government that first said that it would deal with the issue of infrastructure deficit in Canada.

We do not see that from the present government. We need to again see a partnership program with the provinces, territories and municipal governments. It is important that we deal with those issues.

*Government Orders*

• (1735)

Clearly, when municipal governments have a very limited tax base, it was the Liberal government in the past that came through and eliminated the issue of GST rebate, which at the time was 57.14%. We were able to save \$1 billion for municipalities across this country.

Municipal governments are saying they do not have those kinds of projects. The previous Liberal government dealt with the green enabling fund, a revolving fund to deal with green projects, something which was well used by municipal governments across the country.

In the 2005 budget, we dealt with brownfields. I am sure, Mr. Speaker, in your own riding you have communities that may have a former gas station site that is very difficult to deal with. With a brownfield of that nature we need leverage money in order to clean it up. We had that in the last government as one of our environmental initiatives, and an extremely important initiative it was.

I talked about the \$1 billion that the government cut in September. We understand that it will cut \$7.4 billion, particularly from environmental initiatives, post-secondary education, job training, research and innovation. I do not understand the logic. Some people say it is ideologically driven. I would say it is simply a lack of understanding of the importance that many of these areas have for Canadians.

We want to be on the cutting edge. If we want to be cutting edge in the world, we need to have the best trained and the best educated people. Therefore, we need innovation.

My colleague from Dartmouth knows all about this. He worked very hard in the past on these issues and knows that unless we are at that cutting edge, we are not able to compete. We need to be able to compete. We need job training programs that will put people back to work, even those who are suddenly out of work after being in a job for 20 or 25 years. How do we deal with older workers? We need a job training program that gives them an incentive to go forward. I would hope the government would look at those kinds of things.

We need to find post-secondary education funding. One of the problems in post-secondary education is that when we transfer money in a block to the provinces, we do not really know where it ends up. That is something we need to talk about, and I would certainly like to talk about it a little more today.

Another area is the environment. I am very disappointed that the government has decided to slash and burn many of the programs that we had in the past to deal with the environment.

I notice that the Minister of the Environment is in the House. I want to say quite sincerely to her and to her parliamentary secretary that in fact we all agree that the environment is probably the number one issue facing humanity today. We see the problem of the polar ice cap melting. We see the problem in terms of habitat being affected by this. We see the issue of depleted rain forests.

The problem is that we on this side of the House understand the urgency of the issue. On that side of the House, government members think they can set targets for 2050. The fact is that they cut \$584.5 million from environmental programs, at Natural Resources

Canada, \$2.9 million in grants and scholarships for post-secondary students. These are the kinds of things which make one wonder. What are they thinking about?

Why would they cut \$227 million from the EnerGuide housing retrofit program? In fact, they cut it without telling anybody. I actually know of people who were in the system and suddenly overnight, they were told they did not qualify any more.

Normally when a government does that type of thing, when it changes a program, it is at least grandfathered to a certain date. The reality is that there are people who had already spent money, who were prepared to move forward to make sure that their homes were environmentally sound, dealing with windows, doors, new furnaces, et cetera, and they were caught by that. That is something I would urge the government to review. It was very sad to see that.

We have seen that situation with EnerGuide for low income households. Again it is another issue where people who need that kind of assistance obviously were in some difficulty. They had relied on this program and again without any warning, it was cut.

Some people would say that this is ideologically driven. I would simply say that the government needs to get better advisers. The government needs to look at what other countries are doing.

• (1740)

In 2005 we brought down project green, which was the most aggressive plan of the G-8 when dealing with climate change. The programs that were in place were ones that Canadians understood, that they could take advantage of and use in their own communities. Over 70,000 homes took advantage of being able to retrofit. There were 70,000 people who thought it was worthwhile enough to participate. EnerGuide programs were rated in the top five of the most efficient Kyoto programs by the environment commissioner, yet without warning they were cut.

In the area of education, I think we are all very aware of the importance of having the best educated society that we can have, to attract the best and the brightest to stay in Canada and to bring the best and the brightest to this country. As a former educator I am particularly sensitive to the fact that we have to provide the ability for research and development for Canadians.

The national government in Ottawa is not responsible for tuitions. The federal government is not responsible for the programs, but as a partner it provides money. The difficulty is that a lot of these are what we call block transfers. I notice that the Standing Committee on Finance is looking at having a separate item identified for post-secondary education. That is very important. Whether members are on that side of the House or this side of the House, we all would like to know where the money goes. We would like to see it identified. It is extremely important that in the post-secondary area that that in fact be done.

One of the things the government could do, and I make this as a recommendation to the government, is it could act immediately on post-secondary education in terms of low income and disabled students. The importance of developing a highly educated and skilled population could be achieved in many ways.

First of all, as we know, investing in students is not about promoting individual wealth. It is not about who is lucky enough to pursue a post-secondary education, to go to college or university. People should have the opportunity regardless of their financial situation.

The previous Liberal government provided tax credits and obviously things toward textbooks as an example. We had the millennium scholarships program. There have been people who have come to the standing committee who want to see that scholarship program back again. It was an initiative of the previous Liberal government. When the millennium occurred, rather than create some big monument to the millennium, it decided to invest in university and college students across the country. It was well received I think by colleagues in all parties.

Cutting youth employment programs is a mistake. Young people often need a part time or summer job in order to make money to go to university. Not having those youth internship programs and literacy programs which are needed is a very sad thing. I am hoping that the government will review that situation.

One area that I talked about it when I was the parliamentary secretary is the Canada social transfer, the CST. It should be divided into a social transfer and a post-secondary education transfer as a means of increasing transparency and accountability. Members on all sides of the House talk about transparency and accountability. This would be very good.

It would also hold the feet of the provinces to the fire. They could not simply say they did not get enough from Ottawa. They would have to indicate the particular area where the money went, for example, the social transfer area. We need to do that with respect to post-secondary education. The Standing Committee on Finance had thorough discussions on that and received excellent representations on it.

It is important that by having the highest educated workforce we also see the problem of increasing tuition fees. Tuition fees do not fall under the purview of Ottawa, but clearly we need to provide as much assistance as we can. We do that in terms of availability for student loans. We see that in terms of grants. We also need to make sure that we have opportunities for students to go out and work in order to help them go to university.

● (1745)

We need to motivate young people. We need to provide opportunities across this country. We live in the greatest country in the world. We have opportunities galore, as long as people have hope. They need hope. One of the things that government can do is not hand out but hand up and it can do that through these kinds of programs. Lack of education is a loss not only for the individual but it is a loss for our country. That is something we cannot continue to see.

### *Government Orders*

One of the areas is the registered education savings plan. One of my colleagues in the House has a private member's bill which says that only 27% of Canadian families in fact have RESPs to pay for their children's education, but they are not tax deductible. The problem is that when they put money into the plan, there is absolutely no credit. One major reason that not many people have a plan is there is not that incentive, whereas there is one with an RRSP.

Making contributions tax deductible, as the bill proposes, would offer families incentives and financial assistance to create a managed RESP. If families put in even \$100 a month, in a year that would be \$1,200. That is important because the aim is to make sure that we get young people into post-secondary institutions.

It would also provide assistance in addressing some of the education costs. It would lessen the impact of post-graduation debt. One of the things I hear about is the debt that students often come out with at the end of their four years of university.

I think all members in the House would concur that we need to make access easier for post-secondary education skills training for our young people. The government has an important role to play. I do not think this is a partisan issue. I do not think it is a Liberal issue, an NDP issue, a Conservative issue or a Bloc issue. It is everyone's issue. How do we approach that?

One-third of the students who left before graduating in 2002 did so for financial reasons. We need to address that issue. It is projected that by 2010 a four year degree program will cost in excess of \$10,000 and that does not include books and all the other things which really add up.

I would like to return briefly to the issue of the environment. I see the parliamentary secretary is here. He and I have worked together in the past. I want to point out that the environment plan the minister presented, the clean air plan, was basically rejected by environmentalists, NGOs and certainly by many members in the House. I thank the government for at least sending the bill to a special committee which will review this piece of legislation. It will be an opportunity to put back many of the things that were decimated in the past.

We have seen, for example, that 92% of the project green funding was cut by the government. Clearly we are still looking at the impact of that. I talked earlier about EnerGuide and other opportunities which Canadians had been using up until the cuts were made.

The minister enunciated yesterday the issue of the debt, particularly the international Kyoto system and about the \$1.5 million. It was not clear today in question period whether the \$1.5 million has been paid. Was the money sent by FedEx? I am not sure. The minister has indicated that it has been paid. I will take her at her word, although her ADM contradicted her in committee yesterday, so I am not really sure. That is something that clearly needs to be sorted out.

*Private Members' Business*

There was the issue of the previous Liberal government proposing to add six greenhouse gases in September 2005 under the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, CEPA. The government is now talking about having to amend CEPA and dealing with different changes. The legislation already has the ability to deal with that. It does not need to be changed.

We have an international responsibility in dealing with the environment and clearly we have to provide both financial support and policy in that regard. That is why the previous government had launched project green, as I said, the most aggressive plan of the G-8.

• (1750)

The fact is that we have to honour our commitments. We often have heard the government say that it is not going to make its targets. For the last 10 months I have not seen anything which would suggest that the government is meeting its targets at all, because it wasted 10 months. We need to move forward in that regard.

I abhor debt of any kind. That is why I was very proud of the previous government's paying down of the national debt. I certainly am pleased to see that the present government is intending to do so, although the \$13 billion that it put down from 2005-06 of course was part of our government.

Mr. Speaker, if you are telling me that my 20 minutes is up, that is a fast 20 minutes, but I have tried to enunciate at least some of the concerns that some of my constituents and I have in this regard.

• (1755)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer):** It being 5:54 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

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## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

### BRAIN TUMOUR SURVEILLANCE

**Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC)** moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, the Minister of Health should continue to work collaboratively with Statistics Canada, the provincial and territorial cancer registries, and key stakeholders towards the ultimate goal of creating uniform national standards and guidelines for the surveillance of all malignant and benign brain tumours, including data collection, analysis and reporting.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is with a great deal of pride and emotion that I stand today to talk about this private member's motion. It identifies a gap in Canada in research on brain tumours, especially benign brain tumours.

There is a gap in the information gathered in that there is no consistency from province to province and territory to territory. There is no opportunity for comparisons of environmental, geographic, hereditary or lifestyle causes of brain tumours.

We have definitely focused on this as a gap in research and we are asking the government to fill that gap and provide consistency with research and record-keeping right across the country, as has been

done in other countries, while many other countries are working to establish the same standard.

First I want to speak to how this happened to come to my attention. Two families in my riding had children afflicted with brain tumours. They came to my office seeking help in a number of ways, including help in raising public awareness or seeking additional research and access to assistance for their predicament, which is most troubling and most difficult to handle.

In 2001, Allison and Wanda MacDonald came to me in my office in Truro, Nova Scotia about their son Matthew, who had passed away the year before. Matthew was diagnosed with a brain tumour at the age of 11 and died at the age of 14. I did not know Matthew, but everybody I talked to said that he truly was an inspiration. I understand that he visited Parliament and was here during his short life. He was named an IWK champion, that is, an Isaac Walton Killam champion, for his positive attitude and his great outlook while he was a patient at Isaac Walton Killam Hospital in Halifax. It is my understanding that he won everyone's heart.

Matthew's father became the chair of the Brain Tumour Research Assistance & Information Network, better known as b.r.a.i.n.child Maritimes, and went to work to try to help other parents and other victims of this affliction.

A few years later, another family came to me. Jennifer and Alan Dempsey from Amherst came to me about their son Brandon. Brandon was diagnosed at the age of four and has had several operations and chemotherapy and radiation. At a young age, he has been through everything that one can possibly imagine. He is now 12. He is in grade seven and has an 88% average. He is doing great. He is enthusiastic and courageous and he too is an inspiration to all of us. If I were allowed to say so, I would point out that he is in the gallery, but I am not allowed to say that, so I will not.

Jennifer, Brandon's mother, has assumed the chair of b.r.a.i.n.child Maritimes. I am so proud that both of these families had the courage, commitment and perseverance to take on this cause after having been through this. I am so glad that we in this House are going to be able to help them with this motion, if it passes, and I sincerely hope it does.

Jennifer and Alan began their eight year battle to help Brandon, but what has happened is that their effort to help Brandon has expanded a lot.

They came to my office. I did not know what to do. I did not know how to help them, but I wanted to. We had a staff meeting and decided that our office would do everything it could to help the Dempsey family and to see if we could help Brandon with his challenges.

We started to gather information. We did what we could. My assistant, Lorne Berndt, who always exceeds expectations, said, "Let us do a private member's bill". I said that was a good idea, not thinking that it would get drawn very soon, and maybe not ever, the way things go, but here we are. It was drawn and here we are with a private member's motion and an opportunity to help.

The impact has been astounding. We have not broadcast this in any way, shape or form. This was focused on trying to help the Dempsey family and the MacDonald family and victims in our area, but what has happened is that we have had responses from all over the country. We have had responses from the United States, Australia, Germany and Britain. The response to and support for this very simple private member's motion have been absolutely incredible. It is a very simple motion asking the government to gather up statistics and to do it on a national basis with national standards.

I want to use the words of others, because I believe they are more meaningful than anything that I could ever say. I have divided them into just some of the statements. We have received hundreds of letters.

● (1800)

I am going to go through a few lines of a few of the letters to give the House an idea of what we are receiving.

Here is one line from a letter from Steve and Melodie Northey in London, Ontario: "As a father who lost his 8 year old daughter to a brain tumour and co-founder 25 years ago of the Brain Tumour Foundation of Canada, I applaud your efforts" and he says he supports this cause.

This is from Natalie TeBrinke of British Columbia, who says: "There have been three people living within 1/4 mile of my house who have been hit with brain cancer. I'm the only one still alive. We need to have answers".

I think we owe them answers.

I have one from Joseph Baldanza of Toronto, who says: "I am part of a family that has lost one member to a brain tumour and 2 others have been diagnosed with different types of brain tumours". He says that we need help.

Sherry Fleming from Dartmouth wrote: "I am the mother of a child who is a brain tumour survivor!...I am not confident that all is being done that can and should be done for prevention and treatment of these tumours".

I hope we can help Sherry.

Joanne Morrison from Mississauga wrote: "My husband Guy was diagnosed with a malignant tumour in December 1997 and passed away from this terrible disease in March of 2002".

Another letter states:

—I have survived since my 2001 diagnosis of a malignant brain tumour.

I was an active, healthy 43 year old wife, mother, and small business operator... As a family, we continue on our healing journey. The doctors have told me it is only a matter of time before the tumour returns.

She totally supports our efforts with Motion No. 235.

### *Private Members' Business*

I even have a letter from Dr. Thomas Chen of Taiwan. I am sure some members know this man. He emailed me and said that his sister was recently diagnosed with a brain tumour and their family is totally devastated and stressed to hear it. He says, "We are sure that all Canadian citizens...and even the world would support you".

Those are just some of the letters we have had from the families and the victims.

Now I want to read for members a few letters that doctors and people in the health care industry have written to us.

Here is a very poignant one. Dr. Michael Cusimano emailed me two or three times. He is a neurosurgeon at St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto. He said:

Dear Mr. Casey:

As a neurosurgeon who deals with a large number of these patients and their families, and someone who would like to study the causes of these tumours in our communities, I applaud this move.

The foresight you have shown in moving this forward will advance the hope for thousands of patients. I hope that this will be the first of many advances for these patients who are often most disenfranchised members of our society because of the nature of their tumours.

He is referring to benign tumours. He went on to explain that in a later letter.

We have had letters from all across the country and from medical facilities everywhere. They are totally supportive of this motion.

One from the B.C. Children's Hospital states: "As the director of the pediatric neuro-oncology program BC, I applaud your efforts" and he says to please push on.

A letter from Princess Margaret Hospital in Toronto states: "As the Administrative Secretary of the Pencer Brain Tumour Centre at the Princess Margaret Hospital...I am writing to express my strong support".

A letter from the Health Sciences Centre in Halifax at the Queen Elizabeth II Hospital states:

I am the Brain Tumour Coordinator at the Queen Elizabeth II Health Sciences Centre in Halifax...As a neuro-oncology nurse who deals daily with the devastating effects the diagnosis of brain tumour has on patients and their families, I applaud your efforts to promote a national, standardized approach to the collection of the... information....

At the University of Calgary, the Calgary Health Region Foothills Medical Centre said the same thing in a letter written by an oncology neurosurgeon and cancer researcher.

These people are busy people, but they see the need.

One letter really is quite amazing. It is from the Princess Margaret Hospital in Toronto and states:

We are writing today to offer our support of your Private Member's Motion M-235.

The passing of Motion M-235 by the House would be a very positive step toward the creation of uniform national standards and guidelines for the surveillance of all malignant and benign brain tumours. This valuable data will be of great assistance to us, and our colleagues around the world in directing future research into treatments for these devastating diseases and ultimately finding a cure.

*Private Members' Business*

This letter was signed by five doctors: Dr. Warren Mason, Dr. Barbara Ann Miller, Dr. Mary Elliott, Dr. Normand Laperriere, and Dr. Cynthia Menard. I am so grateful to them for taking the time to do this.

Another letter came from Australia, from Denis Strangman, chair of the International Brain Tumour Alliance. He said that he had just returned from Australia and the New South Wales cancer registry has decided to count benign brain tumours in all of its information. That is exactly what we want to have done here.

I want to thank the doctors who took the time to send me my last batch of letters.

● (1805)

This letter is from the Brain Tumour Foundation of Canada. Every director of the board sent me a letter, but here is one of them. It states:

I am writing to express my strong support...As a neurosurgeon and Vice-Chair of the Board of Directors of the Brain Tumour Foundation of Canada...This information may help patients and families to access the resources they so desperately need.

I received a letter from Dr. David Colman, Ph.D. from the Wilder Penfield Institute at McGill University and the Montreal Neurological Institute. He says:

As Director of the Montreal Neurological Institute and Hospital at McGill University...This motion will help us answer questions about the incidence, best treatment practice and outcomes for brain tumour patients...

As a coincidence, Dr. Wilder Penfield operated on my grandmother decades ago when she went blind. Dr. Wilder Penfield operated on her and restored her sight somehow through brain surgery. She is long gone, but it was such a surprise to get this letter and to have that memory revived.

I have letters of support from the Robarts Research Institute in London, Ontario, the Algoma District Brain Tumours Support Group, the brain tumour research and assistance network at the IWK Health Centre in Halifax and the North American Brain Tumour Coalition in the United States.

This is a letter from Dr. Dr. Cusimano. He said, and this is the key:

It is extremely important to realize that the word "benign" is not entirely appropriate when it comes to brain tumours...This work represents a critical first step towards making meaningful progress that will not only have ripples throughout Canadian society but also help those with brain tumours elsewhere by the new knowledge, research and awareness it will raise.

Those words are far more effective than anything I can say. I ask members in the House to support the bill. It will do nothing but good and will help a lot of people, young people, old people, people who have no place to turn now. This will provide them with a great deal of tools and research ability that they do not have.

I do not want to finish without thanking Jennifer and Brandon for their incredible contribution to this cause and for their dedication and Allison and Wanda MacDonald, who lost their son Matthew and who are still working on this cause to raise attention and public awareness. They have put the spotlight on this gap in research and we are all very grateful for them.

I want to thank all those hundreds of people and doctors who have so surprisingly written me and our office with letters of support, all

the organizations which supplied us with the details. I want to thank the Minister of Health who has supported us 100%.

I want to thank the Prime Minister for taking the time today to meet with Jennifer and Brandon. It meant so much to them and so much to us. He took the time to invite young Brandon to his office. He chatted with him and talked about what he had gone through in the way of treatment. He also asked how he was doing in school.

I want to thank all the MPs in the House today for listening to this and for their support. I want to thank my staff especially Lorne Berndt for his dedication and great work drafting this.

In closing, I will read a quote by Jennifer Dempsey, Brandon's mother, from the *Amherst Daily News* today. She said

When I first started on this I was doing it for Brandon, which was rather personal and selfish of me, but I believe this is going to help people all across Canada and in other places.

For Jennifer and Brandon, they already have helped so many people. They have done a great job and we are all very grateful for their persistence and determination.

**Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his excellent bill and his thoughtful presentation. I think he will find a lot of support in the House for this tremendous initiative. The member's speech was very well researched and he had a lot of interesting information. Is there anything that he has not had a chance to say that he would like to say? I would like to give him that time to complete his speech.

A constituent of mine has complained, validly, about the determinants of cancer, which we could control such as chemicals in society. Could the member answer these two questions. First, why has he not extended this to all forms of cancer? That information would be helpful in saving living lives in other forms of cancer. Second, if the research could then be also studied to analyze or enumerate the causes of those cancers, could help prevent it in the future?

● (1810)

**Mr. Bill Casey:** Mr. Speaker, these cases have honed in on a gap in the research. There are more research statistics on cancer than there is on benign tumours. This is the issue. Benign tumours are often overlooked. As Dr. Cusimano from Toronto said, it is an inappropriate word. Because they are benign, often they are left off the statistics. Some people think that if benign tumours were included in the statistics we have now, there would be 40% more tumours listed.

My understanding is that there are 55,000 Canadians now suffering from brain tumours of one type or another, and we do not want to prevent anybody from having research. We want to ensure that they are all researched and recorded in a uniform way across the country so we can determine just exactly what the member raised.

Is this a cluster of people who have tumours and why? Is it hereditary, or is it environment, or is it lifestyle, or is there another group that may live near some kind of a mine or something, or some radiation? We have no idea. Without statistics, we cannot say. We cannot match the groups to find out.

*Private Members' Business*

**Mr. Steven Fletcher (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the bill. The member's commitment to fighting cancer is commendable, and I think all Canadians should be very proud of the work he has done.

Could the member talk about the initiative, the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer, and how there will be synergies between the member's initiative and the \$260 million over five years that the government has committed, of which the entire cancer community is supportive. Could he comment on the government's work on cancer and how it works with his private member's bill?

**Mr. Bill Casey:** Mr. Speaker, I want to emphasize, as I said it quickly, that I thank the Minister of Health for his support. He has been instrumental in us drafting the bill. After we drafted it, we asked him if he could support it. He said that if we could make a few little changes, he would love to support it. I am not allowed to say what goes on in caucus. However, he spoke in support of it, but I cannot tell anybody.

He has been very supportive all the way along. In fact, he said we should make this part of our \$260 million cancer strategy, on which the parliamentary secretary worked.

To answer the member's question, I had a letter from a neurosurgeon who said that he thought this all tied in nicely with what the government was doing, and he supported it in that way.

Again, I thank the Minister of Health. He met with Brandon and Jennifer today. He had a long chat with them about their circumstances and what they had been through. He has been very supportive.

I am sure we will make progress with this.

**Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to speak to the motion on a subject matter that is often important to many thousands of Canadians who are affected by brain tumours.

I would like to congratulate my colleague, the member for Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley for the excellent job he has done on this issue and for placing before the House this important motion. It is one that I support without reservation.

Often hear in the House we hear members say that issues are not a partisan matter, but quite often they turn out to be that way. In this case it certainly is not.

I first had this issue highlighted to me when I was visited by a number of people, including Ann Chapman, the coordinating nurse at the IWK Brain Tumour Clinic perhaps just over a year ago. She told us of the plight of Canadians who were suffering from brain tumours.

I know Ann a little and I know of her dedication to children as a nurse at the IWK. As my hon. colleague did with the Dempsey family, if I were allowed to mention that Ann's daughter Ashley is with us today, I would, but since I am not I will continue.

As the nurse coordinator, Ann comes into daily contact with young children and their families all the time, families who struggle with this awful disease. She is with families throughout their

treatment, and she wrote me a letter, which I would like to read only a small part. She said:

As the nurse coordinator who sits by the bedside of far too many children and families to help support them through this devastating diagnosis and treatment, this bill cannot get passed soon enough. This bill will help raise awareness about the actual number of Canadians diagnosed with brain tumors, both malignant and benign. There are many children diagnosed with "Benign" brain tumors but the treatment and late effects can be hardly considered benign on a young developing brain. Some children with "Benign" brain tumors undergo multiple surgeries and are treated with chemotherapy and radiation, so this word benign is misleading.

I have been on the board of the Isaac Walton Killam Children's Hospital in Nova Scotia before I became a member, Ann Chapman represents the kind of work that is done by so many people at that great institution in dealing with children from Atlantic Canada.

I believe the motion today will help raise awareness of persons diagnosed with brain tumours, both malignant and benign.

Statistics provided to us by the Canadian Alliance of Brain Tumour Organizations really are troubling. Every year in every community in Canada it is possible that someone could be diagnosed with a brain tumour. Data indicates that up to 10,000 Canadians are diagnosed with a primary or metastatic brain tumour in each year. Sadly, children account for about a third of that total.

Although some children are diagnosed with benign brain tumours, the treatment and the ensuing effects are such that it potentially harms a child's developing brain. Many of these people, as we have heard from Ann, have to endure very invasive surgeries that are treated with chemotherapy as well as radiation.

We hear that accurate data on primary brain tumours is needed to facilitate the research. We need accurate pan-Canadian data in order to better understand this disease, and by better understanding it, we can provide improved diagnosis and improved treatment.

The Canadian Alliance of Brain Tumour Organizations tells us that there is no national mechanism or standard for the collection of both malignant and benign brain tumours data. They have a particular concern that jurisdictions in Canada seem to be reporting only the malignant cases. It is clear, as has been suggested earlier, that we need to have a better understanding of the actual numbers to accurately reflect the impact of this awful disease on Canadians and their families.

I am very pleased that this motion calls upon the government to work with its provincial partners and advocacy groups in order to obtain timely and accurate data. I am also pleased to hear from my colleague that this has the support of the Minister of Health and the Prime Minister of Canada.

*Private Members' Business*

Brain tumours are second only to leukemia in incidence in children. The effects of brain tumours are particularly devastating because of the fact they are centred in the person's centre of thought, emotion and movement. The impact on families, as we have heard, is devastating.

I would like, if I could, to read a letter. Two constituents of mine have sent me letters today. They talk about the impact of this disease on their family. Marilyn Parker in Dartmouth wrote to me in support of the bill. She said:

Over a one year period Deanna underwent 5 different protocols of Chemotherapy and then finally 6 weeks (30 treatments) of radiation in Boston, USA. Deanna is now 10 years old and in Grade 5 at Robert Kemp Turner Elementary School. Miraculously, Deanna suffers no neurological deficits but suffer some, what I consider to be minor, physical deficits (vision, hearing, growth, thyroid). She is very active in school and community activities and is the joy of my life (along with her 2 older brothers).

• (1815)

I have a letter from Colleen Ferguson. She took the time to write to me today. Part of her letter is as follows:

I am the mother of a child with a brain tumour. Our son Mitchell was diagnosed in January of 2001 with a benign brain tumour. Once our surgeon indicated that the tumour was benign, we thought we would have somewhat of a reprieve. This, in fact, was not the case. As a result, Mitch has undergone four major brain surgeries, and a few minor.

Not soon after his diagnosis of a benign brain tumour, he quickly deteriorated. Mitchell was very ill. For quite some time we weren't sure that he would make it. The benign tumour became a mix of benign and malignant. This tumour has resulted in Mitchell undergoing six weeks of radiation and three and one half years of chemotherapy. The benign/malignant tumour, along with the treatments, has left our son with some definite deficits. We are learning to overcome some of these deficits, and with your help, families such as ours, will have more resources to draw upon.

These are pretty devastating stories, pretty impactful stories, from families who are affected by brain tumours. We are fortunate in Canada to live in a country that prides itself on its health care system. Many countries in the world are nowhere near as fortunate.

One of the principles of medicare is that nobody should be denied health service based on where they live or their condition. But we know there are gaps. We hear it all the time. Those gaps affect lives, often dramatically. Gaps can be province to province, perhaps another form of two tier health care in Canada. Treatment options vary dramatically in a lot of cases across Canada, and certainly in the case of brain tumours.

Last year, I presented a statement in this House on the issue of brain tumours after my visit with Ann Chapman and her friends. I have learned a great deal since then about how this issue affects the lives of our fellow Canadians.

As parliamentarians it is our duty to make choices every day and some of those are very difficult. The voices of people with brain tumours speak to the need to do more. We have heard the stories of families whose lives have been turned upside down, of Mitchell and Deanna and their families, of Brandon, who inspired his mother Jennifer Dempsey to work with the hon. member for Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley to bring this motion forward today.

Many of us know people who have gone through chemotherapy or radiation. I have had two parents who have gone through cancer

treatments. I can hardly imagine three and a half years of chemotherapy and how that impacts on individuals and their family.

I hope in some small measure that we can all be of help in creating greater awareness of this issue. Again, my congratulations to my Nova Scotia colleague for his work. I urge all members to support this motion.

• (1820)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, this is a motion that calls on all hon. members who are concerned about the growing incidence of cancer to take action. The motivation and concern shared by many members, if not all, sitting here in this House is obvious. I will read the motion:

That, in the opinion of the House, the Minister of Health should continue to work collaboratively with Statistics Canada—

So far, so good.

—the provincial and territorial cancer registries, and key stakeholders towards the ultimate goal of creating uniform national standards and guidelines for the surveillance of all malignant and benign brain tumours, including data collection, analysis and reporting.

The Bloc Québécois cannot support such a motion because it interferes in areas of provincial jurisdiction. I am not the only one who feels this way. I will read what was reported in *La Presse*:

The Quebec government has decided not to join the project. “We are glad the other provinces are joining forces to fight cancer, but we already have our own strategy”, explained Isabelle Mérizzi, press secretary to health minister Philippe Couillard.

Since we are talking about health and cancer, I would also like to read what Premier Jean Charest said in reaction to the letter from the federal Minister of Health:

The day-to-day management of the health care network and health services delivery is our responsibility. And it would be a good idea for the federal government not to interfere in how we provide health care. In fact it would be a very bad idea for the federal government to stick its nose in how we provide health care services.

Quebec's health minister, Philippe Couillard, in reaction to the federal health minister's letter said:

We will absolutely not tolerate the slightest interference in our jurisdiction...the organization and prioritization of and our approach to providing health care and social services in Quebec are strictly the concern of the Government of Quebec.

We see clearly that the Bloc Québécois is not the only one pulling these ideas out of the hat, that it is not a recent issue and that it is shared by all political stakeholders in Quebec, whether they belong to a federalist Liberal government, a nationalist Liberal government or the Parti québécois.

So this is a long, ongoing story. When a motion says that national standards and guidelines are going to be created, the Bloc Québécois cannot support it. We are very concerned about the tragedy of cancer, which continues to increase. The figures are alarming. Statistics can be cited today in this House to show the extent of the problem. They say there is a new case every four minutes and eight deaths every minute. Indeed some cases are alarming and this rise of 3% a year in cancer diagnoses is very worrisome.



Perhaps not all the provinces have done their homework either, and they must each assume their responsibilities. For instance, with regard to wait lists, patients with cancer or prostate cancer receive their first treatment within four weeks. The situation is not the same in every province. They say that Saskatchewan is the province where wait times are the longest. Apparently over half of patients wait more than 12 weeks.

I can understand why a federal minister or an MP sitting here in Parliament feels concerned about patients living in the province they represent. But they should put pressure on their provincial government to better meet the expectations of the population.

• (1825)

They say that Quebec's performance is quite decent. It is also compared to Manitoba, which won the top rating for the most efficient system with median wait times of barely a week. Quebec is also aiming to reduce wait times for cancer patients.

Definitely it must also be recognized that Quebec has a strategy of its own. The issue is very complex. We know that health requires many types of intervention from various sectors, be it doctors, local community health centres or additional support provided by organizations involved in the medical field.

In 1998, Quebec adopted an integrated plan so as to improve its response to the problem of cancer. We built on the expertise of several players whose mandate was to ensure the sharing of information to ensure greater consistency in our actions. So it is not a question of pettiness or insensitivity, it is a desire to be more consistent in our intervention strategy.

I can understand the person who tabled tonight's motion. It is a matter of concern to all of us and there is a lot of sensitivity surrounding it. But it is not by voting in favour of this motion that we will help Quebec to do a better job.

Let us revisit an issue that I would have liked to see debated here this evening. As we all know, since 1994, cuts made to health care have been staggering. The Canada social transfer was cut by \$6.2 billion. That included a portion for education, but also a portion for health care. That money was put into paying down the debt. Other spending was given priority during that time and provincial jurisdictions were encroached upon.

Today's debate is extremely important if we want to help the provinces better meet the needs of Canadians. I would like to talk about the fiscal imbalance. It is the Bloc Québécois that laid the issue on the table. Now, the Conservatives have finally recognized this and the Liberals call it financial pressure on the provinces. We are talking about the fiscal imbalance here today only because the Bloc Québécois brought it up and made it clear that there was a fiscal imbalance, which was adding pressure to the finances of Quebec and the other provinces. They must show that they also acknowledge the existence of the fiscal imbalance and that they would also like to be fairly compensated for the sums they do not have in their coffers, so they may better meet the needs of Canadians.

It is all well and good to set social standards and impose them on the provinces. It is easy to take a paternalistic approach, impose standards and say that there have to be objectives and action plans, but the provinces must be able to meet the public's needs. We know

### *Private Members' Business*

that the federal government has too much tax money in its coffers for the responsibilities it has. Who has the hospitals, who has the community service centres, who provides care and social services for the public? The provinces.

We have a motion before us today. I do not think that Quebec and the other provinces do not want to provide information about their own programs or strategies, but all political players have said no to imposing national standards on the provinces.

Today, if we are serious about this, I would have liked to hear a proposal stating that the government recognizes the fiscal imbalance and that it must be corrected so that the provinces can meet the public's health care needs, especially with regard to cancer, and that the government will help the provinces by immediately correcting the fiscal imbalance. Health care must be a provincial responsibility, and the provinces must have all the tools necessary to better meet the public's needs.

• (1830)

[English]

**Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to support the motion.

There is no question that this country does not have a surveillance method for brain tumours, either benign or malignant. It is important at the beginning, because when people hear the words "brain cancer" or "brain tumour", they think of a malignant cancer. While a benign tumour is not cancer, it nevertheless can cause a great deal of damage to an individual.

Unfortunately, people who read a bit about medical terminology may hear the word "benign" and not pay much attention, because they think benign means it is okay and they do not have to worry. For example, if someone was suspected of having breast cancer and the result of the biopsy was that the tumour was benign, the person would sigh with relief, because benign to most people means that everything will be fine.

There has been less focus in the area of benign tumours, less focus on surveillance, less focus on follow-up and less focus on the kinds of supports that need to be in place for children or adults who may be diagnosed with a benign tumour. Whether a tumour is benign or malignant, with treatment, people can be very lucky with malignant brain tumours and may do well.

With benign tumours, we know that while the tumour will not spread, it may recur and in point of fact, does recur. It is not at all uncommon. I can think of three people in my life who have recurring benign brain tumours. For at least two of those individuals, the surgery and the treatment for the benign brain tumours has caused permanent physical disability. One person has lost most vision. One person has a number of facial movement and speech disorders.

When a breast tumour is removed, damage is not done to the surrounding area. When a benign brain tumour is removed, there is the potential for damage to the surrounding area, depending on where it is, because of the closeness to all those areas that control thought, smell, sense, movement and all of that.

*Private Members' Business*

It is important to have surveillance on both. I thank the member for moving the motion, because most of the focus has been on malignant tumours. If surveillance is done, there is an opportunity to determine if it is consistent across the country. Are there provinces or parts of provinces where this is seen to a greater degree? The federal government needs to know that and we need to be able to share that with other provinces.

In the case of neurotubular disorders, when surveillance was done, suddenly we saw a far larger number of children with neurotubular disorders. Although one should never see any, the statistics said that we would see a larger number of children with neurotubular disorders in areas where spraying was going on.

● (1835)

It helps us when we look across the country to see if there are places where we need to have a closer look at the environment in which children or adults who are developing tumours live.

It provides us with an opportunity to look at what happens after treatment. We do not currently provide enough support after treatment. The benign or malignant tumour has been treated and halted but there are no support programs in place that provide for education, job retraining, any health care that might be needed because the individuals do not fit into the existing categories. They do not have particular challenges for which programs have already been developed. They are often simply at home with no support or they are out of school or have to stand back from their jobs which supported their families. There has not been a focus on post-treatment supports that those individuals would need.

I would agree strongly with the member from Dartmouth that we have a health care system in which we believe that nobody should be denied treatment. The better the surveillance that is done, the more likely we are to be able to get more causal information and the better we are able to respond not just to the tumour but to what kind of support people need after the fact.

People in rural areas obviously need more support than people in urban areas because they have to travel for their treatment. That support has to be in place.

It also allows us to look at what we see in terms of population groups. Are we seeing more adults? Are we seeing more children? What percentage of them are children under five, teenagers, or older adults? What are we seeing around age? What are we seeing around cultural background or ethnic background? Do we see more people from a particular ethnic background than another? That would let us do a far better surveillance. It would also let us know more about genetics. Do we think it is familial or not? Surveillance allows us to identify that kind of information as well and then to be able to set up in the way that we have done with other kinds of cancers and whether there is a familial characteristic to a particular kind of tumour.

This may very well require more funds, not just funds for surveillance but because programs are significantly lacking after treatment, there are going to have to be more dollars for health, education and training certainly from the federal government and perhaps provincial governments. We need to make sure that once

people are identified as having particular needs, they are not one offs and they are provided with particular programs that meet their needs.

There is a funding issue. We know that provincial governments are struggling for health care dollars now. They cannot meet the needs of everybody, with rising drug costs, wait times and growing populations. Having been a health minister, I know how hard it is to meet everybody's needs within a health budget.

I would like there to be a federal government responsibility to look at surveillance in a more overall way. I do not want people to have to bring a motion to the House every time somebody has a disease on which we need to do surveillance. It is a very cumbersome and ineffective way of doing surveillance.

● (1840)

It is not that I do not support the member's motion; I do. In terms of how we do surveillance on illnesses across our country, I do not want it to be a one-off approach just because a member can bring forward a motion because it is important to the member. I would like the approach to be done in a more organized, systematic, efficacious way than we currently see.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer):** I am afraid I have to cut off the hon. member as her time has expired.

Resuming debate with the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health.

**Mr. Steven Fletcher (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to comment on the member's concluding remarks. In fact, this motion is very compatible with the government's agenda to increase collaboration with the provinces and territories and is well aligned with the Canadian strategy for cancer control which has now been released as a pan-Canadian partnership to fight cancer. It also goes along with the healthy living and chronic disease initiative that this government is pursuing to create a comprehensive pan-Canadian surveillance system. The member's concern about surveillance has been addressed by the government, which is very positive.

Speaking to the motion itself, first let me congratulate the member for Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley on this excellent motion. As we know, benign brain tumours have not routinely been collected by provincial and territorial cancer registries and thus are not included in the Canadian Cancer Registry.

There are several reasons why data on benign brain tumours should be collected. First, there is the human dimension. Brain cancer is the most common solid tumour in children and youth. Each year in Canada over 200 children and youth under the age of 20 are diagnosed with brain tumours and nearly 60 die from their disease. Among those who survive, the long term health effects and functioning consequences are serious.

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In addition, brain cancer is also significant among young adults. In 2003 there were 388 cases diagnosed within the 20 to 44 age group, or close to 20% of brain cancer cases among Canadians age 20 or older. In total, 2,500 cases and 1,650 deaths from brain and nervous system cancer are expected in 2006 in Canada. The number of brain and nervous system cancer cases would increase by between 40% and 70% if benign cases were included. Benign cases contribute to a substantial portion of the total burden of brain cancer.

Second, the creation of uniform national standards and guidelines for the surveillance of all types of brain tumours has the potential to improve the quality and completeness of brain tumour registration across Canada.

Third, having this complete and accurate data on primary brain tumours would facilitate research into the causes of this disease, which may lead to improved diagnosis and treatment of patients. It would, for example, help identify factors that influence the risk for developing various types of brain tumours.

Fourth, cancer registries serve several important purposes by linking available sources of administrative data to obtain information on a number of new cancer cases and corresponding patient follow-up information. This information allows basic surveillance and establishes a platform to provide the additional information needed to develop and evaluate cancer control programs.

There are also links from cancer registries to other administrative databases, such as vital statistics, to further assess the causes of cancer, behavioural risk factors, as well as occupational and environmental exposures. It would also allow an evaluation of trends in the rates of newly diagnosed cases.

Fifth, the inclusion of benign brain tumours is also needed to allow these tumours to be compared across registries both nationally and internationally.

Sixth, there are many subtypes of brain and nervous system cancers. The chance of recovery and choice of treatment depends on the type, grade and location of the tumour and whether the cancer remains after surgery and/or has spread to other parts of the brain. In addition, since studies have demonstrated that some benign brain cancers transform into more dangerous types of tumours, the full spectrum of information about these diseases should be included in cancer registries.

• (1845)

As I said earlier, the motion is highly compatible with the government's agenda to increase collaboration with the provinces and territories. It is well aligned with the objective of the health minister to create a comprehensive, pan-Canadian surveillance system.

I heard some of the comments from my hon. colleague from the Bloc and it is important that Canadians from coast to coast to coast understand that there are synergies that can be gained by working together, that people in Quebec, Manitoba, Newfoundland and Labrador, B.C., Yukon and so forth can benefit by us sharing information and learning from each other's experiences. One of the great flaws that we see in the Bloc's argument time and time again is that somehow pandemic or other diseases respect provincial

boundaries. Of course they do not and we need to work together so that all Canadians can be as healthy as possible.

I would also like to take a moment to comment on the leadership that the Minister of Health and the Prime Minister have undertaken with the creation of the Canadian partnership to fight cancer. This partnership has the backing of all the major cancer groups throughout the land, including the Canadian Cancer Society and the prostate and breast cancer groups. We could name any type of cancer group and we would find that they all support the government's initiative.

When I was the health critic, I brought forward a motion on June 7, 2005, when the government of the day refused to fully fund and implement the strategy, even though every stakeholder in the cancer community supported the initiative. It took a change in government and the political will of the Prime Minister and the Minister of Health to ensure that the strategy could be brought forward.

The motion that the member has brought forward demonstrates the importance of the government's strategy to fight cancer. It will be a model for future parliaments on how to deal with chronic disease and, hopefully, we will defeat cancer.

However, it will take all Canadians working together, be it on walks or runs, or just individual responsibility or guidance from the government on how we can ensure that the risks to the health of Canadians are such that fewer Canadians will develop cancer.

Just last Friday, the health minister and the environment minister made a major announcement on reducing and eliminating the number of toxic substances that exist in Canada. This makes Canada a world leader in this area. A suggestion was made that many of the toxins and compounds that will be banned are some of the reasons why people acquire cancer. This government has demonstrated a profound sense of leadership and vision to ensure that Canadians live healthy lives.

This ties in very well to our wait times guarantee and other very innovative and thoughtful approaches that this government has taken in dealing with our health care crisis. As the population grows older, cancer cases will increase but if we can manage that increase and work together to increase, not only the lifespan but the healthspan of Canadians, we will improve their quality of life, reduce wait times and together we will all be stronger as we stand together.

• (1850)

No matter what part of the country we are from, Quebec, Ontario or Manitoba, by sharing data and having national standards we can make significant improvements. I think the bill brought forward by the member for Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley and the initiatives of the Prime Minister, the Minister of Health and the entire Canadian cancer community will go a long way to ensure that Canadians are as healthy as they can be.

I congratulate the member and I thank the members for listening to this presentation and I wish everyone a happy holiday season.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

[Translation]

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer):** The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired and the motion is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

**ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS**

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[English]

## ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

**Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, in response to my question on November 6, the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development said:

I am certainly prepared to meet with the chief or any other chief, at any time.

He subsequently said:

The Pikangikum community is one of close to 200 communities which the government inherited where the drinking water system is at high risk or worse.

Further on in his answer he said:

Certainly I am prepared to meet at any time to discuss the way forward.

My question is the same now as it was at the beginning of November. When will the minister meet with the leadership in Pikangikum to help them deal with this public health crisis?

I want to quote the Northwestern Health Unit's observations and final recommendations in its inspection report on the Pikangikum water and sewage systems. The report states:

The most basic of twentieth century (ie last century) health-supporting water/sewage infrastructures are not available to Pikangikum First Nation residents. This includes (but is not limited to) housing, air/water/soil contamination control and regulation, drinking/water provision and sewage disposal. In multiple conversations with federal and provincial representatives, the longstanding neglect is explained, in various rhetorical guises, through a citing of resource constraints and "big picture" considerations.

Further on in the report, it states:

Northwestern Health Unit Recommendation: It is recommended that, in the presence of, and led by, Pikangikum Elders, Chief and Council, and consultants of the community's choosing, an immediate (in 2006) meeting of the federal and provincial Ministries of Health, INAC, and the Public Health Agency of Canada, be held in Pikangikum regarding the urgent and longstanding need for adequate water provision, housing, and sewage disposal in the community. Tangible outcomes from this meeting are required. Anything less than this constitutes a tacit approval of the present illness-producing situation, and a continued liability regarding such health hazards as outbreaks of water/sewage-related illness.

Those are direct quotes from the Northwestern Health Unit. It sent a team in to look at the situation and, at the request of the community, presented a report with a number of observations and recommendations. These include both short term recommendations that could be immediately implemented, as well as some longer term plans.

The last quote was the overall recommendation. What has the minister done to date to meet that recommendation?

● (1855)

**Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to respond to the question of the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan regarding the first nation community of Pikangikum.

I first want to assure members of this House that the government regards the situation in Pikangikum with the utmost seriousness. The health and safety of all first nations is a priority for Canada's new government. In partnership with the community, I am determined to resolve the difficult situation in Pikangikum as soon as possible.

I recognize that this community faces a number of serious challenges. This is a remote community with difficulties in infrastructure, drinking water and waste water, compounded by limited access to electrical power. It has the economic and social issues that go with difficult living conditions, one tragically being a high rate of suicide. Frequent changes in the leadership have further complicated the problem.

Indian and Northern Affairs is committed to working with the Pikangikum First Nation, its tribal council and the Nishnawbe Aski Nation to address these and the other financial, social and capacity issues that challenge this community. We are determined to create an effective and an integrated approach to resolving these issues in both the short and the long term.

In fact, I wrote to the standing committee on November 8 asking for its advice. I recognized the complex, multi-faceted issues that face the community and accordingly I sought the counsel of this House. However, I am disappointed to say that the committee has not answered my call to contribute to finding a solution for the long-standing despicable conditions in Pikangikum, conditions that deteriorated under the watch of the former Liberal government and in the riding of the former Liberal minister of Indian affairs nonetheless.

Contrary to the avoidance tactics of the standing committee, action is being taken on Pikangikum. To this end, we are working with the Pikangikum First Nation and the Independent First Nations Alliance Tribal Council to plan and provide for the community's infrastructure needs. Meetings were held to further discussions as recently as November 2 and November 16 and, subject to weather conditions tomorrow, December 13, INAC and Health Canada officials, Nishnawbe Aski Nation grand chief, Stan Beardy, and tribal council officials will be meeting with the chief and the council in the community to further discuss the development of an action plan for the community.

Pikangikum's water treatment plant, run by a certified level three operator, is producing clean and safe water. Community members have access to this water at a water point located at the plant. We have also provided \$900,000 in special funding to repair other vandalized or neglected water points throughout the community.

I am also devoting funds to address the long term water issues in Pikangikum. One million dollars has been identified for water and waste water work in the community this fiscal year, \$1.1 million for next year and a total of \$9 million in future years.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

However, there are considerable barriers facing the expansion of the water services, one of which is limited electrical power. Over the past six years we have provided \$7.5 million to assist Pikangikum in connecting to the Ontario power grid system via a power line to Red Lake, but financial issues, frequent changes to the community's leadership and changes in the provincial regulatory environment have hampered the development of this project. Nonetheless, we continue to be committed to work together. We have budgeted another \$14 million over the next two years to complete the grid.

In closing, I am also aware that the growing student population in Pikangikum requires a new facility. We are working to address overcrowding in this school.

● (1900)

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for his answer but it is well within the minister's purview to take immediate action. Some short term solutions were recommended in the Northwestern Health Unit's report that are within both the minister's and the department's area of responsibility. These include things like decades old technology used across the north to deliver safe treated water to homes by trucks that can happen immediately. Community and climate appropriate, in-home or modern external portable toilet sewage disposal could be provided immediately.

I agree that some longer term issues need to be dealt with but the department, with direction from the minister, could take immediate action. It is this kind of immediate action that we are asking the minister to undertake. There are other examples of communities where there has been the political will to take these issues on.

I wonder when the minister will act on these short term immediate issues that have been—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer):** The hon. Minister of Indian Affairs.

**Hon. Jim Prentice:** Mr. Speaker, let me repeat that the government is determined to work with all partners to bring about real and lasting change for this community. It is for that reason that I asked for the advice of the committee and I reiterate my disappointment in the hon. member for passing the buck when she had a chance to act toward positive change.

Conservative members on the committee stood up for the people of Pikangikum while this hon. member and others have brought us here tonight to try to get out of this on technicalities. The committee has a mandate to visit communities. Even though the committee's counsel has been requested by both myself and the first nation, the hon. member continues to argue against going. It is shocking how fast the tides turn when it is no longer the shopping trip to New York, but rather a trip to the troubled community of Pikangikum.

The new Conservative government will not sit idly by while opposition members turn a blind eye. Instead, we believe that we will collaborate with the community to solve problems, and make a real and lasting difference for the people of Pikangikum if the committee will not.

[*Translation*]

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF CANADA

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in this adjournment

debate and to express my concern with regard to the lack of funding by ACOA for the women in business initiative and the SEED capital program, among others.

These programs make it possible to help people in Atlantic Canada acquire business skills and capital they need to set up, modernize and expand their businesses. Entrepreneurs are vital engines of growth in the Atlantic area. In addition to creating job opportunities in all sectors, local entrepreneurs further stimulate the economic performance of all Atlantic regions.

However, according to information received, ACOA no longer has funds available for programs such as the SEED capital program and the women in business initiative.

Operating one's own business certainly has its rewards, but also has its challenges. For a business to reach its full potential, a certain number of elements must be mastered, including planning, finances and marketing. Entrepreneurs in rural areas, such as my riding of Madawaska—Restigouche, face the considerable challenges of financing and training.

Through ACOA programs, these people can get the training they need for successful start-up. Despite the obstacles they have to overcome, more people than ever before in Madawaska—Restigouche and the rest of Atlantic Canada are starting businesses. These people deserve a tip of the hat for taking on the risk involved in starting a business, but I must also note that ACOA has a role to play in promoting and improving economic development in rural areas like the one I represent.

Many of them depend on ACOA's seed capital program, which provides loans to start or improve a small business, as well as acquire business skills training. I myself oversaw the program for a number of years, so I understand the reality and the need for this kind of program, which enables our young people to start businesses without having to deal with a charter bank or credit union.

Another program currently experiencing difficulty is the women in business initiative, which helps many women in the region. In 2002, the Liberal government established the women in business initiative, a \$17 million program designed to offer strategic financial support to female entrepreneurs in Atlantic Canada. Over the past few years, ACOA has been receiving more and more funding requests. Atlantic communities depend heavily on the support of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency to make many of their businesses successful.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

Since this government came to power, funding has been refused or delayed for a number of projects. I would therefore ask the government to ensure that communities in Atlantic Canada will no longer be penalized because of this government's lack of leadership. We know that small and medium businesses are the economic backbone of this country and Atlantic Canada. The region I represent is no different in that respect. We must meet our citizens' needs and make more funds available to improve the region's economic development.

In closing, I would like to say one more thing. Will the minister continue to attack youth, women and entrepreneurs in Atlantic Canada, or will he announce tonight his intention to put funds back into these programs retroactively?

• (1905)

[*English*]

**Mr. Rob Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Madawaska—Restigouche for bringing this forward. It is a privilege to respond to his question tonight.

Our government continues to stand up for New Brunswick and in fact all of Atlantic Canada. Through ACOA the Government of Canada is focusing on helping New Brunswickers and all Atlantic Canadians succeed in business.

Our government is very much aware that the community of Baker Brook is facing significant economic challenges as the result of the downsizing of the local softwood mill. It might interest the hon. member to know that through ACOA the Government of Canada is continuing to focus on helping New Brunswickers succeed. We worked hard to conclude a softwood lumber agreement with the Americans that continues to ensure that the lumber produced from the logs harvested in the Atlantic provinces will remain exempt from border measures.

The agreement is the right one for Atlantic Canada's forestry sector which employs 30,500 forestry workers and accounts for 6% of Canada's softwood lumber exports to the United States.

The agreement ensures that lumber produced from logs harvested in the Atlantic provinces which are certified by the Maritime Lumber Bureau will not be subject to border measures. It exempts from border measures logs harvested in the state of Maine, a key component of bilateral trade in that region.

These producers used to be subject to anti-dumping duty orders and thus the agreement is of even greater benefit to them. In fact, the agreement enjoys the support of the three largest softwood producing provinces as well as the support of Atlantic Canada, the territories, and a clear majority of Canadian lumber producers.

Our government understands the need to be responsive to communities that depend on traditional industries such as forestry when they are faced with a significant downturn in industry or the closure of a major employer.

We also recognize that there is no one single solution. Any sustainable response relies on a strategic approach and effective partnerships. That is why the Government of Canada through ACOA continues to work with the local community economic development

agency, the province and the community itself to help diversify the Baker Brook economy, and create other employment opportunities in the region.

ACOA remains committed through its various programs to fostering an environment in which businesses and communities in Atlantic Canada can grow and thrive. We are delivering on this commitment. The New Brunswick seed capital program continues to help rural entrepreneurs start and grow their businesses. This important program continues to be delivered across the province by community business development corporations and community economic development agencies including CBDC Madawaska and the CBDC Victoria Madawaska-South Community Business Development Corporations.

ACOA also provides advice and assistance through its women in business initiative where advisers provide business counselling and training services to women entrepreneurs. This initiative continues to support women's business networks and management training allowances for women entrepreneurs throughout the province including the northwest region.

ACOA remains committed to actively working with Atlantic Canadians to build strong communities. We recognize, and this government especially recognizes, that strong communities build a strong nation.

• (1910)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours:** Mr. Speaker, I am happy to see my colleague from New Brunswick reply. Still, I would have appreciated a response from the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency or from the minister of ACOA. That would have been interesting.

I would just like to ask the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, since he mentioned the seed capital program and the women in business initiative, whether he can guarantee today that funding will be restored for loans to entrepreneurs, women, youth and people who want to make a better life for themselves in Madawaska—Restigouche, or whether what has happened in recent months, when no funds have been available for loans under these two programs, will be repeated.

By the way, I would like to point out to my colleague that I represent the region of Madawaska, but also the region of Restigouche.

I would like to know whether funding for these two programs will be retroactive and whether loans will be provided for people who want to go into business in my riding of Madawaska—Restigouche and in Atlantic Canada.

[*English*]

**Mr. Rob Moore:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from New Brunswick for his question and I can assure the hon. member that the government will continue to support Atlantic Canada and will continue to provide support to New Brunswickers.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

Over the past 11 months our new government has announced significant investments in New Brunswick communities. These include a regional pool for Shipigan and the Acadian Peninsula, infrastructure funding for the Huntsman Marine Science Centre, continued development of the Fundy Trail, upgrading of the Sainte-Anne-de-Madawaska municipal water system, and a new multi-functional learning and training centre in Saint-Francois de Madawaska .

Over the past 11 months in northwestern New Brunswick alone, our government has approved investments of \$8.2 million. These investments have leveraged more than \$10.7 million in additional public and private funding, strengthening economic infrastructure and quality of life in communities across the region. So absolutely, the government will continue to support New Brunswick communities, New Brunswickers and all Atlantic Canadians.

## PENSIONS

**Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I want to take this rare opportunity to follow up on the question I asked the minister last week about the error admitted to by Statistics Canada in calculating the rate of inflation.

At that time I asked specifically about the impact of this mistake on Canadians whose income is tied to the consumer price index. By way of example, I referred to seniors who have been shortchanged on their CPP and OAS for the last five years.

The minister's response was wholly inadequate, both in tone and, frankly, in substance. She began by saying, "unfortunately Statistics Canada does take a retroactive look". That is not unfortunate, far from it.

If a serious error has been made that negatively impacts Canadians, then it is not unfortunate, but absolutely essential that the agency takes a look back to correct the error. The minister's response was callous and it lacked compassion.

Seniors have worked hard all their lives. They have played by the rules and all they are asking for now is for what is rightfully theirs. Reimbursing them is not unfortunate. It is the right thing to do.

That leads me to the next part of the minister's answer that was also incomprehensible. She said, "that adjustment is being incorporated with the regular updates to OAS and the GIS".

What adjustment exactly is it that the minister is making? Is she only addressing the shortfall from here on in, or can seniors expect to receive the money that they are owed retroactively since the miscalculation was first made in 2001?

Why did the minister limit her response to the OAS and the GIS when my question specifically asked her about the Canada pension plan? Is the government reimbursing Canadian pensioners for the money that they did not receive for the last five years? All I need from the minister is a simple yes or no.

Then, of course, the minister said the adjustment was "very small". Really? She clearly moves in different circles than all of us who live in Hamilton Mountain. This purportedly small adjustment for seniors amounts to over \$1 billion.

While that may be pocket change to the government, it is a lifeline for seniors who are facing daily decisions about whether to buy food or pay their rent. It is time for the government to stop listening only to Bay Street and to start hearing the real concerns of Canadians as they desperately try to make ends meet.

The official consumer price index affects a whole host of payments that are based on the official inflation level as calculated by Statistics Canada: contracts, collective agreements, welfare rates and even inflation-proof investments that use the CPI to help determine payouts to bondholders.

The minister's blasé attitude about this issue is an absolute disgrace. The government owes it to Canadians of all ages and incomes to table a comprehensive report on how it plans to deal with making the appropriate corrections. Canadians deserve nothing less.

● (1915)

**Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise in response to the member for Hamilton Mountain on the issue of providing good stewardship to Canada's pension plan for seniors. I thank her for drawing this issue to the attention of the House.

As has been reported in the media, Statistics Canada understated Canada's overall consumer price index by, on average, one-tenth of one percentage point between July 2001 and March 2006, that is, over a five year period.

The error related specifically to cost estimates associated with hotel and motel rooms, one of 600 components that are tracked in the calculation of this index. Statistics Canada had reported that room rates fell 16% when they actually rose 32%. We understand that Statistics Canada has now corrected the consumer price index, effective June 2006.

The Department of Human Resources and Social Development is required by law to use the published CPI data in the indexation of the Canada pension plan and old age security benefits. Human Resources and Social Development Canada acted correctly and according to the law.

In terms of the old age security benefits, these were adjusted in October, as these benefits are adjusted on a quarterly basis. Effective January 2007, the rate increase for CPP benefits will reflect the correct consumer price index as CPP benefit adjustments are made on an annual basis. These benefit adjustments are being made pursuant to the regulations set out in the CPP and OAS acts based on the consumer price indexes published by Statistics Canada during the period of the issue.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

I wish to assure the member for Hamilton Mountain that Canada's new government is keenly aware of the contributions made by seniors to our country. We are making it a priority to ensure the Canada pension plan, the old age security program and the guaranteed income supplement remain the foundation of basic income security for seniors in their retirement years.

Retirement pensions under the Canada pension plan are received by over three million seniors, while benefits under old age security are received by four million. Together these programs put over \$50 billion in the hands of Canada's seniors every year. In addition, the guaranteed income supplement helps over 1.5 million low income seniors. Last year these seniors received supplement payments totalling over \$6.5 billion.

Thanks to these solid cornerstones of Canada's retirement income system, we have witnessed a gratifying trend. The incidence of poverty among seniors has been dramatically falling, from almost 21% in 1980 to less than 6% in 2004. This government, working with the member opposite, wants to continue on this momentum.

**Ms. Chris Charlton:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the government's response to my question, but perhaps I was too verbose in the way I put my question. Let me try to restate it much more succinctly. Will seniors get what is owed to them retroactively going back to 2001, yes or no?

I appreciate all the rhetoric about the government being keenly aware of the plight of seniors, but the reality is the government has done nothing, absolutely nothing, to improve the income supports that are available to seniors now. There has been no dramatic increase to the OAS, GIS, or CPP. There has not even been a parliamentary committee to review the process.

We know that in communities like Hamilton seniors are increasingly living in poverty. They are finding it harder and harder to make ends meet. Seniors do not need rhetoric. They need action.

Please tell me, yes or no, will seniors will be able to expect a refund cheque going back to 2001?

• (1920)

**Mrs. Lynne Yelich:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her question, but I would like to take this opportunity to ask her to help us put through Bill C-36 which would really be an asset for seniors. I would like to inform the House that Canada's new government has introduced important legislation for seniors in Bill C-36, An Act to amend the Canada Pension Plan and the Old Age Security Act.

Under Bill C-36, seniors would apply for the guaranteed income supplement at the same time they applied for old age security. No separate application would be required. In addition, as long as seniors filed regular tax returns, they would automatically receive the GIS benefit in any year that they were entitled to it. This is good news for seniors. They would never need to reapply. In a nutshell, it means that all eligible seniors should receive the GIS as long as they file Canadian tax returns.

That is good news for seniors, that is good news for Canadians and that is good news for the member.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer):** The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:21 p.m.)







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