



CANADA

# House of Commons Debates

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OFFICIAL REPORT  
(HANSARD)

**Wednesday, January 31, 2007**

—

**Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken**

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# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, January 31, 2007

The House met at 2 p.m.

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*Prayers*

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• (1400)

[English]

**The Speaker:** It being Wednesday, we will now have the singing of the national anthem led by the hon. member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca.

[Members sang the national anthem]

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## STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

### THE ENVIRONMENT

**Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Kootenay—Columbia is one of the most fantastic areas on earth with majestic mountain ranges, picturesque lakes, lush valleys, natural hot springs and charming historic communities. Environmental protection is our priority. Living in the mountains at the source of the mighty Columbia River, we appreciate the pristine water and air.

We note that Canada's new government has replaced environmental talk with real environmental action through: a chemicals management plan to regulate potentially harmful substances; Canada's first ever clean air act tackling greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution; a biofuels plan; \$2 billion in three new ecoenergy initiatives; and exempting donations of ecologically sensitive land from capital gains tax.

While other parties offered Canadians more empty platitudes, Canada's new government is taking real action to clean up our air, land and water. Kootenay residents have struck a healthy balance between work and play, respecting our spectacular natural environment.

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### HRANT DINK

**Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to express my sorrow and condemnation of the brutal unprovoked murder of Turkish Armenian journalist, Mr. Hrant Dink, on January 19, 2007 in Istanbul, Turkey. I wish to extend my sympathies to the family of Mr. Dink and to the Armenian

community throughout the world. My thoughts and prayers are with them.

Mr. Dink was an internationally respected journalist, intellectual and a prominent Armenian voice in Turkey. He believed there could be understanding, dialogue and peace among peoples.

During his distinguished career, Mr. Dink was outspoken against the state, advocating the opinion that Turkey committed genocide between 1915 and 1917 when it forced a mass evacuation from the Ottoman Empire and the related deaths of 1.5 million Armenians. He became victim 1.5 million and one. Mr. Dink's life's work will no doubt serve as an inspiration to other writers around the world who use the power of the pen as a weapon against brutality.

I also add my voice to the thousands at his funeral who stated, "I am Hrant Dink. I am Armenian".

\* \* \*

[Translation]

### JEAN-YVES GUINDON

**Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, today I would like to pay tribute to Jean-Yves Guindon, a watercolourist in my riding.

During the first Academia XXI gala of the international academy of fine arts of Quebec, held on November 4 in Montreal, Jean-Yves Guindon, a renowned artist in the Petite-Nation region, won the silver Athena prize in the professional category for his watercolour, *L'entrée du village*.

A number of well-known artists call Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel home and make their living practising their art there. Our communities have found ways to create environments that support artistic creation in various disciplines and have given our artists the opportunity to become regionally, nationally and internationally recognized.

I would like to congratulate Jean-Yves Guindon on his excellent work and on the recognition he has received from his peers by winning the silver Athena prize at the international academy of fine arts of Quebec gala. Bravo.

*Statements by Members*

●(1405)

*[English]***JANNIT RABINOVITCH**

**Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, today I would like to honour the life of Jannit Rabinovitch who passed away on January 26. A respected community leader and advocate for the marginalized in Victoria, Jannit understood that transformative change was needed to address homelessness, drug addiction and prostitution. She believed that for people to live with dignity and pride we must first empower the voiceless.

Jannit brought together women fleeing violence and with them built Sandi Merriman House. She also co-founded PEERS, an organization that works to prevent marginalized women from disappearing into the night as they did in Vancouver.

While Jannit's death is an immense loss to our community of Victoria, her life is an inspiration for those who continue to work to eradicate injustice.

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**AFGHANISTAN**

**Mrs. Betty Hinton (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I take this opportunity today on the first anniversary of the signing of the Afghanistan Compact to recognize all the Canadian women and men working in Afghanistan. The military, diplomats, police, including the RCMP, development and aid workers continue the noble Canadian tradition of taking an active role in bringing stability and peace to areas that have seen turmoil and upheaval.

We are there with 36 other nations at the request of the democratically elected government of Afghanistan and as part of a UN sanctioned and NATO led mission to help build a stable democratic and self-sufficient society.

Canada's overall objectives are being achieved on three fronts: security, development and governance.

Our troops and all Canadians in Afghanistan deserve our support as they work to bring security and democracy to that country.

I know that members of the House join me in saluting them.

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**NATIONAL ETHNIC PRESS**

**Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, last Friday I attended the 30th anniversary of the National Ethnic Press of Canada celebration. Its president, Mr. Thomas Saras, and the organization dedicated the evening in recognition of our Canadian military on its proud history and commending members of the military on the excellent work they do both within Canada and on the international front.

The national ethnic press is a vitally important and essential media organization. Given the diversity of our country, it plays a vital role in informing Canadians from coast to coast of all that is happening in our country and from all corners of the world. That is but one of many reasons that it deserves the government's support.

In closing, I want to take this opportunity to congratulate Mr. Thomas Saras, his entire executive and the national ethnic press for 30 successful years and wish them many more successful years in the future.

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**CANADIAN FORCES**

**Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, recently I completed my sixth annual winter tour of my constituency. Over a three week period I met with constituents in coffee shops and town halls during which the worst blizzard in a half a century struck. As author Wallace Stegner, who knew Saskatchewan weather well, said, "you don't get out of the wind, but learn to lean against it".

Although the mail did not go through, Blackstrap constituents did, braving the cold to meet me where they demonstrated the way they lean, in telling our soldiers how much they appreciate them by signing Blackstrap's banner in support of our troops. We filled six banners with names and places. These banners will go to our troops deployed in Afghanistan.

Blackstrap residents are sending a message to the Canadian armed forces thanking them for their commitment to world security and democratic development. Our troops' tireless efforts are helping Afghanistan to rebuild, one school at a time. Canada has reclaimed its place on the world stage.

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*[Translation]***MICHEL G. BERGERON**

**Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, during the XVI International AIDS Conference, media attention focused on an innovative product to prevent the spread of the virus: microbicides, a kind of invisible condom filled with a prophylactic gel and designed to be used by women.

During the conference and later on at the Université Laval's Infectiology Research Centre, I had the honour of meeting the centre's founder and director, a pioneer in the field of microbicides, Dr. Michel Bergeron.

Today, I would like to pay tribute to this outstanding researcher, who won the prestigious Wilder Penfield prize in 2005. I would like to thank this visionary for giving women effective protection against the spread of AIDS. Like the World Health Organization, Dr. Bergeron recognizes that effective prevention depends on developing a method that women can use and control.

I would like to congratulate Dr. Bergeron and thank him for his passion and determination. Congratulations also to his entire team.

*Statements by Members*

• (1410)  
[English]

**IMMIGRANTS**

**Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday Statistics Canada released a report highlighting that the financial situation of new immigrants showed no improvement from 1992 to 2004. This should come as no surprise given that the Liberals were in power. Despite a lot of talk, they just did not get the job done.

While the Liberals froze assistance to help new immigrants read and write for over 12 years and voted against increased funding, we have committed \$307 million in settlement funding to help newcomers integrate and excel in Canada. We have cut the right of permanent residence fee in half. We have granted almost 11,000 off-campus work permits to international students. We committed \$18 million to establish an agency to address the assessment and recognition of foreign credentials.

When it comes to new Canadians, our government cares and we show we care by delivering real results.

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**STEVEN TRUSCOTT**

**Mr. Paul Steckle (Huron—Bruce, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, on September 19, 1959 in the Goderich, Ontario courthouse, Justice Ferguson sentenced Steven Truscott to death. On that day nearly 50 years ago, a child's innocence was stolen and a cloud settled over the Canadian justice system that remains still.

I can remember as I listened live to the sentence. In the years that followed my belief that a miscarriage of justice had occurred grew in leaps and bounds. Public concerns grew equally until finally on October 28, 2004 the Liberal justice minister said that there was reason to believe that a miscarriage of justice may have occurred. With this he referred the matter to the Ontario Court of Appeal.

Earlier today on live national television the court began the process of hearing this matter. I am optimistic that the five justices considering this case will see that there is indeed reason to believe that Mr. Truscott was wrongfully convicted.

I wish Mr. Truscott and his family well as they enter into this process. I look forward to a day when Steven can wake up for the first time in half a century an innocent man.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**AFGHANISTAN**

**Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, an Afghan I spoke to last week in Kandahar said, "We have made a lot of progress in the past few years, and with your help, we can succeed. If you leave, we will have to start all over again."

I saw our Canadian troops, men and women who have bravely travelled to the far reaches of the world to lend the Afghan people a helping hand. Fathers, mothers, sons and daughters have left their loved ones to secure an area marked by years of conflict, to help the Afghan people take charge of their own future and live in safety.

The road is long and difficult. Without our support and the help of the 36 coalition countries, Afghans will return to the middle ages and a regime of terror that has already begun to spread to North America.

Today, I pay homage to the courage of the civilian and military personnel who are risking their lives to defend peace in Afghanistan. They fill me with pride. To me, they are true Canadian heroes.

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[English]

**HAROLD ELLIOTT**

**Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I bring to the attention of all my colleagues in the House of Commons one of Canada's greatest citizens and one of our bravest heroes, Mr. Harold Elliott of Eastern Passage, Nova Scotia.

Harold Elliott is going to receive from the Ambassador of France la Légion d'honneur, France's highest honour, for his efforts in World War II.

Mr. Elliott was born in that wonderful community of Happy Adventure, Newfoundland. He now resides in Eastern Passage, Nova Scotia.

During the war he signed up as an underage recruit. He served in the Battle of the Bulge, a member of the only Canadian contingent to do so. He was severely wounded in Normandy, severely wounded in Germany, and spent several years in hospital in Britain and in Montreal. He was a former police officer and police chief in Ontario and Alberta. He now resides in Nova Scotia.

Soon he will be receiving this very great award from the people of France. To Harold Elliott and to all veterans, it is we who salute them and we congratulate Harold on his great award.

\* \* \*

• (1415)  
[Translation]

**DRUIDE LABORATORIES**

**Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to salute the efforts that a company from Pointe-Claire, Quebec, Laboratoires Druide, is making to create sustainable jobs and reduce unemployment in Kabul, Afghanistan.

With financial support from CIDA's industrial cooperation program, Druide and an Afghan partner have set up a new plant to manufacture liquid soaps for personal and household use. And in keeping with Druide's environmentally friendly approach, the plant is producing certified organic products.

The Canadian-Afghan joint venture, called Florance, currently employs eight Afghan women and eight Afghan men and could expand in the short term.

I want to congratulate CIDA and Druide on their social involvement, which may seem minimal compared to the huge needs in Afghanistan, but is nonetheless extremely important.

*Oral Questions***RICHARD GRAVEL**

**Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, this evening, many people will gather to mark the retirement of Richard Gravel, a community police officer from Longueuil and resident of the riding of Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher. He will retire after 30 years of service as a police officer. For 23 years, he worked on preventing crime in schools, the community, homes and businesses by responding to the needs of those sectors and providing citizens with the support they needed.

Today, Longueuil, its residents, community agencies and schools are saying farewell to a friend, confidant and protector.

Richard Gravel is known for his professionalism, discipline and devotion. He is an extremely endearing person who always inspired appreciation and respect from the public and his police officer colleagues.

I would like to take this opportunity to express to Officer Gravel how proud I am to represent him in the House of Commons and, on behalf of the people of Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, I wish him a retirement full of happy times with his loved ones.

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[English]

**THE ENVIRONMENT**

**Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Climate Action Now, spearheaded by Anna-Maria Galante, is a group of concerned citizens in my riding of Kings—Hants that is seeking to raise awareness of global warming.

[Translation]

This group launched a green ribbon campaign last fall to draw attention to the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

[English]

In November, they walked and biked 100 kilometres to Halifax to present ribbons to MLAs in the provincial House, demonstrating the power of individual action when mobilized. These ribbons allow individuals to show publicly that they acknowledge climate change is an important issue.

I commend the members of Climate Change Now for showing what a small group of concerned local citizens can do. They have shown that with climate change it is important to think globally and act locally. Their message to the government is to act nationally and lead internationally.

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**HEALTH**

**Mr. Dave Batters (Palliser, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this week the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca boasted about his new role in setting Liberal policies, including health care, saying that “all the things that I’ve been putting together and pushing for...I’ll be able to put on the table where the decisions will be made by a very small group”.

Members opposite need to be careful, because this is the same member who in 2000 said, “To save our medical system, we must embrace new ideas, such as allowing a separate, parallel, private

system...”, and who told *The Province* newspaper last March, “The Canada Health Act is not sacred”.

Canadians are learning that they cannot trust the new Liberal Leader to show leadership on climate change or get tough on Liberal corruption. Now they should be left wondering whether the Liberals are really committed to publicly funded health care in Canada.

Our government supports the Canada Health Act and we are committed to making publicly funded health care in Canada work again.

The Leader of the Opposition should be straight with Canadians. Will the Liberals set their health care policy based on the views of a member who said that the Canada Health Act is not sacred?

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**ORAL QUESTIONS**

[English]

**THE ENVIRONMENT**

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, despite all the scientific evidence showing that global warming induced by human activity is the worst ecological threat of our time, Canada is unfortunate enough to have a Prime Minister who is a climate change denier.

He even went so far as to write a fundraising letter a few years ago to raise money for his battle against Kyoto, and he wrote, “Kyoto is essentially a socialist scheme to suck money out of wealth-producing nations”.

Does the Prime Minister still agree with his wrong statement? Does he still agree with himself?

● (1420)

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this government has run on, and has introduced, the clean air act because we believe we have to take action on the science of climate change.

The only person who denies the science here today is the Leader of the Opposition, who, when asked about emissions, said this month on CTV Newsnet, “But about clean air, it’s certainly not true that we have one of the worst records. It’s one of the cleanest air you may find in the developed world.”

Our emissions are near the bottom of the developed world, not just on carbon dioxide, but on nitrogen oxide and sulphur oxide. The leader of the Liberal Party should stop denying the science.

[Translation]

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I will try again in French.

*Oral Questions*

In 2002, the Prime Minister said what I just quoted a moment ago. He said that the science of climate change was speculative and contradictory. What is troubling is that on December 14, 2006, he spoke of the so-called greenhouse gases.

The question is very simple. Does he still agree with himself? Does he still agree with his 2002 statement and that of December 14, 2006?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this government is taking action. During the election campaign, this government recognized the science of climate change and it still recognizes the science.

However, in 2007, it is the Leader of the Opposition who, when explaining his record, said: “But about clean air, it’s certainly not true that we have one of the worst records.” The very opposite is true. Our carbon dioxide emissions are the worst, and so are our sulphur dioxide and nitrous oxide emissions. The leader of the Liberal Party should stop denying the science.

[*English*]

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister wants to have a debate about who is a real leader. A real leader would say that he was wrong and say, “I agree that I was wrong and I have changed my mind”. The problem is that he did not change his mind. He is still a climate change denier.

He is still thinking as he did at that time when he wrote, “This may be a lot of fun for a few scientific and environmental elites in Ottawa”. That is what he was saying about the science of climate change.

He is still a climate change denier. Will he admit that this new environmental facade is just an attempt to mislead the Canadian people?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Again, Mr. Speaker, this government has made it clear in the election campaign and since that we accept the science, and that is why we are acting.

Once again, the only denier here, in his own words, is the Leader of the Opposition. I suggest that he should rename that dog for all his various denials. Perhaps he could call the dog Clean Air or perhaps he could call him Fiscal Imbalance, or maybe he could even call his dog the Sponsorship Scandal.

**Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the British Prime Minister has said that climate change can only be addressed through a robust, inclusive and binding international treaty, but this Prime Minister wants Canada to stand alone. In 2002 he promised:

We will oppose ratification of the Kyoto Protocol and its targets. We will work with the provinces and others to discourage the implementation of these targets. And we will rescind the targets when we have the opportunity to do so.

Now the Prime Minister has the opportunity.

• (1425)

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to tell the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore that I totally agreed with him when he said, “You just didn’t get the job done.”

Here are some other comments:

The job losses from Kyoto ratification will affect all regions of Canada. Have the Ontario Liberal members of Parliament asked the government for detailed information on job losses in Ontario due to the blind ratification of Kyoto?

Do we know who asked that? The member for Kings—Hants asked that.

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

**The Speaker:** Order, please. I know it is Wednesday, but we must have some order in the House. There seems to be excessive noise today. The hon. member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore has the floor now to ask his supplementary question.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, one of these days, we will have a clear answer to a clear question.

The Prime Minister organized a fund-raising campaign to fight against the Kyoto protocol. He called the protocol “dangerous and destructive”, and said he would go “all the way” to stop it from being enforced.

My question is for the Prime Minister. Will he admit that he was wrong about the Kyoto protocol or will he continue to mislead the public?

[*English*]

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore, the deputy leader of the Liberal Party, will agree with this comment: “I think our party has got into a mess on the environment.”

Do we know who said that? The member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore. I can tell members that I agree with the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore.

Here is another quote that I wonder if the hon. member opposite will agree with: “If Canada does ratify Kyoto...the cost...would be as much as \$40-billion a year.”

Do we know who said that? It was the official spokesman, the Liberal critic for environment, the member for Ottawa South, who said that.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**AEROSPACE INDUSTRY**

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, rather than ensuring that Quebec receives 60% of the spinoffs from the \$3.4 billion contract awarded to Boeing, the government is taking no action and citing market forces as the excuse. In reality, there is method to this laissez-faire attitude. According to the Director of the UQAM research group on military industry and security, Yves Bélanger, if the federal government does not set conditions, 70% of the contract spin-offs will go to the western provinces and Ontario.

Will the Prime Minister acknowledge that, by not intervening, his government has knowingly favoured the western provinces and Ontario to the detriment of Quebec, where the Canadian aerospace industry is concentrated?

*Oral Questions*

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, once again, the military decides on the needs of the armed forces. The government's role is to sign contracts at the best price on behalf of taxpayers and to ensure that Canada will reap the benefits. The distribution of these benefits is determined by the contracting company and its ties to the industry. It is not determined by political interference.

That would also apply if we were to build the Bloc leader's high-speed train.

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, Boeing has two plants in Canada—one in Winnipeg and the other in Richmond, B.C.—and its main suppliers are based in Ontario. Consequently, last year, according to the calculations of Yves Bélanger, an expert in this field, the western provinces and Ontario reaped 70% of the economic benefits of all transactions between Boeing and the Canadian aerospace industry. There is a definite pattern emerging and the Conservative government cannot ignore it.

Will the Prime Minister admit that by acting as he did, his government chose to abandon Quebec and favour western Canada and Ontario?

**Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have said this before and I will repeat it today to the members of the Bloc Québécois—this is important: Canadian and Quebec companies can reap the benefits of these contracts. There are over \$13 billion in industrial spinoffs, more than \$13 billion for companies across the country.

What is the Bloc doing at present? The Bloc Québécois is talking, the Bloc Québécois is questioning, the Bloc Québécois is getting excited. However, the Bloc Québécois will never be able to deliver these contracts to Canada.

•(1430)

**Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, according to the UQAM expert, 70% of Boeing's business in Canada last year was concentrated in Ontario and western Canada. The Minister of Industry knew it then and he knows it now.

Can the minister deny that by letting Boeing do whatever it wants and refusing to impose any obligations on the company, he is dealing a serious blow to Quebec's aerospace industry and is fully aware of doing so?

**Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we are talking about buying military equipment that our soldiers need at the best possible price.

Furthermore, our government is giving Quebec's aerospace companies the opportunity to cash in on high-level, lucrative economic spinoffs, not to mention technology transfer that will enable the Canadian aerospace industry to be a leader on the world stage.

We are proud of what we are doing. Unlike us, the Bloc Québécois will never be able to do this.

**Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, what the minister is doing is betraying Quebec.

How can a minister from Quebec, who claims to be working in Quebec's best interest, be party to a strategy that is damaging Quebec's aerospace industry and will result in 70% of the spinoffs from the Boeing contract going to Ontario and western Canada? Can the minister explain this to us? Can the traitor to Quebec answer that question?

**Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, once again, the Bloc Québécois is speculating. It is speculating about the figures, about how much will be allocated, about contracts for various Canadian companies.

The reality is that Quebec businesses are competent, and workers in Quebec's aerospace industry are competent and capable of competing internationally to win the necessary contracts.

We will ensure that these contracts bring in good, lasting technology transfer for the industry.

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### THE ENVIRONMENT

**Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, because of the lack of progress at the Nairobi conference on climate change, chaired by this government, which has no political will, the UN is now convening a summit in September.

My question is for the Prime Minister. Will Canada take part in this summit, yes or no? By then, will we be an example for the whole world to follow? Or will he choose to stay in his world of socialist schemes?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have not received an invitation. But if I were to receive one, Canada would take part.

[English]

**Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians are firmly committed to the Kyoto protocol and they want to see action. They want cleaner air to breathe and they have not been getting it from the government.

The government has to stop hiding behind the pathetic performance of the previous Liberal government and start explaining its own position.

My question is for the Prime Minister. These boutique measures we have seen so far are nothing but a drop in the bucket. Why does the Prime Minister not start taking some action? Let us start by telling his cabinet ministers to stop the limousines from idling day in and day out around Parliament Hill.

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, on the question of the limousines, I completely agree with the position of the leader of the NDP on this.

The difficulty is that we have drivers who must be here and who are not allowed a room to wait in the House of Commons in cold weather. I think the House of Commons should rectify that situation.



*Oral Questions*

**Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell (Nunavut, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the world's scientific community is about to release a report that is unanimous about the growing climate change crisis. The Kyoto protocol is the only global effort to deal with this crisis, but the Prime Minister has never believed in Kyoto. In fact, he has said, "as economic policy, the Kyoto accord is a disaster, and as environmental policy, it is a fraud".

Was the Prime Minister misleading Canadians then, or is he misleading them now?

• (1435)

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, let me indicate to the member opposite that those of us on this side of the House recognize that Kyoto was about a global effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions around the world and here in Canada.

While we share the disappointment of many Canadians and people from around the world that the former government did not meet its obligations and accept its responsibilities, this government will be taking real action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions at the same time as making our air more breathable for young children with asthma in our large cities right across the country.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, they keep avoiding answering questions.

Despite warnings from prominent scientists, the Prime Minister believes that he alone knows the truth.

Even though countries around the world are working to achieve the Kyoto targets, the Prime Minister is saying, "I do not think we should sign an agreement that would make us just about the only country in the world that is doing anything".

Will the Prime Minister admit that he was wrong when he said that, or will he continue to mislead Canadians?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, we were the first government in Canadian history to say that we were going to start creating regulations for Canadian industry, and not just on greenhouse gases, but also on air quality in Canada. I know that the members opposite and their party had a lot of problems accomplishing anything in this area. They had a chance to act, a chance to make a huge difference in our environment, but they did not take it.

**Mr. Anthony Rota (Nipissing—Timiskaming, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, once again, they are not answering the question.

While the scientific community is calling on world leaders to take action against climate change, the Prime Minister said: "Kyoto is designed to address the so-called 'greenhouse gas' phenomenon, the hypothesis that the increase of certain gases contributes to a long-term global warming trend".

Will the Prime Minister admit he was wrong when he made that statement or will he continue to mislead the public?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I say to my colleague that it is very important for Canada to assume its responsibilities, not just in the world, but also in Canada, with real action to reduce greenhouse gases. For 13 long years we

saw the previous government do absolutely nothing on this issue. We are the first government in the history of Canada to introduce a bill to take real action in this very important issue.

[*English*]

**Hon. John Godfrey (Don Valley West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the world's scientific community is about to release a report that is unequivocal about the growing climate change crisis. The Kyoto protocol is the only global effort to deal with this issue, but the Prime Minister has never believed in Kyoto. In fact, he claimed:

As the effects trickle through other industries, workers and consumers everywhere in Canada will lose. THERE ARE NO CANADIAN WINNERS UNDER THE KYOTO ACCORD.

Was the Prime Minister misleading Canadians then, or is he misleading them now?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I can tell the member that the Prime Minister always has agreed that we must take real action. That is why the Prime Minister has tabled real legislation to reduce greenhouse gases, something that the previous government never did.

While we are talking about quotes, what about this quote, "when people see the cost of Kyoto, they are going to scream". Who said that? It was the environment critic for the Liberal Party, the member for Ottawa South.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, when it came time to vote in the Standing Committee on the Environment on the territorial approach to combating greenhouse gases, the members of the government voted against it.

We would like the Minister of the Environment to explain to us why his government is against the territorial approach. Is this not just another way to protect the oil industry in Alberta and the auto industry in Ontario? If it is, let him stand up and say so.

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this government will take action to address the major concerns as far as greenhouse gases and air quality are concerned.

For 13 years, the Bloc members in this House of Commons did absolutely nothing on this issue. Now, the Conservative government will take action.

• (1440)

**Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the previous government earmarked \$328 million for Quebec. Unfortunately, the stubbornness of the former Liberal environment minister derailed everything.

Will the new Minister of the Environment, unlike his colleague from Transport, agree to pay the \$328 million needed to allow Quebec to achieve the Kyoto protocol objectives?

*Oral Questions*

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, after I was named Minister of the Environment, I spoke with my counterpart, Quebec's environment minister, and I said that I was prepared to meet with the minister to discuss Quebec's needs.

I have already spoken with many of my colleagues from the other provinces and I am in the process of becoming acquainted with their needs. I know that the Liberal government in Quebec is very aware of the need to reduce greenhouse gases, because for the past 13 long years it got absolutely nothing from the former government.

\* \* \*

**AFGHANISTAN**

**Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, Afghan President Karzai said that he was open to negotiations with the Taliban. More than once, he has invited them to lay down arms and incorporate the rule of law. President Karzai recently reiterated his willingness to undertake such negotiations.

Can the Minister of Foreign Affairs tell us if the Canadian government supports President Karzai's initiative?

[English]

**Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, President Karzai leads a legitimate, democratically elected government. He has been reaching out to those who are encouraged to working toward a peaceful solution in Afghanistan, those who want to follow a democratic process, those who renounce violence, and he has made some progress in that regard.

Canada will continue to work with Afghanistan, to work with the 60 other countries that are there on the ground doing incredible work on the reconstruction, on the development and on providing the security they need to continue to build that country.

[Translation]

**Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Undersecretary of State for Foreign Affairs of the Italian Republic recently proposed holding an international conference on Afghanistan. President Karzai supports this initiative.

Will the Minister of Foreign Affairs promote such a conference and give it his active support?

[English]

**Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I was in Brussels last week, meeting with NATO foreign ministers. We have been attending every conference with respect to the situation there. We have also been a major part of the Afghanistan compact, which is one year old today. It sets out a very clear plan for governance, for development and for the type of security that allows these initiatives to take root.

We are very much a part of every effort to bring about peace, security and prosperity inside Afghanistan.

[Translation]

**THE ENVIRONMENT**

**Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as the international scientific community assembles in Paris and unanimously underscores the importance of urgent action on climate change, the Prime Minister is using all his political weight to put on the brakes.

This Prime Minister believes that, "The accord does negatively impact every region of the country... It is important to build a coalition across the country to defeat Kyoto."

Will the Prime Minister admit that he was wrong or will he continue to mislead the public?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to make it clear that scientific evidence tells us to act as soon as possible. That is our goal.

The committee studying Bill C-30 met on Monday and we saw that the Liberal Party is not comfortable with the idea of working harder and passing Bill C-30 as soon as possible. It wants to analyze and conduct more studies. That is not the best course of action in a file that is so important for Canada.

[English]

**Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have still not answered the question.

The world's scientific community is about to release a report that is unanimous about the growing climate change crisis. The Kyoto protocol is the only global effort to deal with the crisis, but the Prime Minister has never believed in Kyoto. In fact, he promised he would, "Redirect federal spending aimed at fulfilling the terms of the increasingly irrelevant Kyoto Protocol".

Was the Prime Minister misleading Canadians then, or is he misleading them now?

• (1445)

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would say to the member opposite that maybe she would like to talk to some of her own caucus colleagues. There is one caucus colleague who said:

Unfortunately Kyoto is a shell game. My friend knows full well that the government has made this into a shell game. We are to pay countries like Russia to buy the ability to produce greenhouse gases. We will produce the same amount of greenhouse gases and say disingenuously that we have met our commitments.

Do members know who said that?

**Some hon. members:** Who?

**Hon. John Baird:** The member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, a member of the Liberal Party.

**Ms. Tina Keeper (Churchill, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the world's scientific community is about to release a report that is unequivocal about the growing climate change crisis. The Kyoto protocol is the only global effort to deal with this crisis. However, the Prime Minister has never believed in Kyoto. In fact, he said, "We think the deal itself is simply bogus."

Was the Prime Minister misleading Canadians then, or is he misleading them now?

*Oral Questions***AEROSPACE INDUSTRY**

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, after 13 long years of Liberal rule in this country, I wonder how some people would define the last days of the Liberal government during the last election campaign.

Another Liberal member said, and this is honestly true, that the Liberal Party was involved in a medium-sized car crash during the recent federal election.

Do members know who said that?

**Some hon. members:** Who?

**Hon. John Baird:** The Liberal environment critic, the member for Ottawa South.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the international scientific community assembled in Paris unanimously agrees. Time is running out and we must immediately solve the serious problems posed by climate change.

The Prime Minister, however, believes, and I quote his own words, “there is no environmental benefit [to Kyoto] of any kind”.

Will the Prime Minister admit that he was wrong to say that or will he continue to mislead the public?

[*English*]

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, hearing the Liberals lecture on the importance of climate change and the environment is almost like listening to a former Enron executive lecture on the importance of sound accounting.

**Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as we have heard, support is growing at the United Nations for the United Nations Secretary-General to call an international summit to discuss climate change.

Does the Prime Minister—

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

**The Speaker:** Order, please. The hon. member for Red Deer has the floor now to put his question. Could we have a little order, please?

**Mr. Bob Mills:** Mr. Speaker, does the Prime Minister support the efforts to hold such a conference? And if one is convened, will he attend?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have read the reports. I can tell the hon. member for Red Deer I have not received an invitation from the United Nations Secretary-General. However, if we did, we would accept.

There are two things we would certainly want to convey at that conference. The first is that we all recognize this is a serious environmental problem that needs immediate action. Canada's decision to do nothing over the past decade was a mistake, and we want to do better.

At the same time, to have a truly effective international effort, we must have the participation of all major emitters, including countries like China, India, the United States and others.

**Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, working families in Manitoba want clarification of remarks made by the unelected Public Works minister Michael Fortier. He reportedly wants to sign the contract for the new Boeing military transports, knowing full well that the deal is unfair to Manitoba. Up to \$150 million is at stake for my province.

Will the Prime Minister turn his back on the people who elected him, or will he make a stand for fairness and ensure these contracts are tendered without political interference?

● (1450)

**Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my NDP colleague. I am very surprised—

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

**The Speaker:** Order, order. The minister has the floor to reply. I know he may have a question, possibly it is a rhetorical one. We are going to have to wait and hear it. The minister has the floor to give his answer and we will hear it now.

**Hon. Maxime Bernier:** Mr. Speaker, why is the NDP asking now for Canadian industrial benefits from our military procurements when the NDP is against our troops, against our missions, and against what we are going to do for our troops in Afghanistan?

What is most important is that we know this government is committed to giving the best equipment possible to our troops, at the best price, and that will result in many Canadian industrial benefits across this country.

**Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I can understand the minister's frustration given the fact that the unelected Senator is not here in the House to answer for the government on this issue. News reports cite a senior Conservative source claiming that Mr. Fortier was hauled out on the carpet at the cabinet committee meeting for his efforts to skew the C-17 contract.

I want to know, is this true? What specific steps have been taken to ensure fairness? What assurance can the Prime Minister give ordinary Canadians that the process will be fair and that we do not have a repeat of the 1986 Mulroney debacle?

**Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our first responsibility and our first priority in military procurement is ensuring the Canadian armed forces have all the tools they need to fulfill the good work that they are doing on behalf of Canadians. That is number one.

Number two, any regional benefits that result from this procurement will be spread across this country in an equitable manner to ensure that all Canadian industries benefit. However, we are going to ensure, first and foremost, that our troops have the resources that they need, the equipment that they need, to continue doing great work on behalf of Canadians.

*Oral Questions***THE ENVIRONMENT**

**Hon. Sue Barnes (London West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the world scientific community is about to release a report that is unequivocal about the growing climate change crisis. The Kyoto protocol is the only global effort to deal with this crisis, but the Prime Minister has never believed in Kyoto. In fact, he dismissed the problem saying: "Carbon dioxide...is a naturally occurring gas essential to the life cycles of the planet".

Was the Prime Minister misleading Canadians then, or is he misleading Canadians now?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, some of the world's leading scientists will gather in Paris to outline what will be some really significant additional scientific research, something that will only encourage us to do more, not just around the world but also in Canada. Canada for too long has not accepted its responsibility when it comes to reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Kyoto was all about a 15 year marathon to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and when the starter's pistol went off, the Liberal Party began running in the opposite direction. This government will act and this government will deliver real results for the environment and for Canada.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, once again the minister refuses to answer the question.

The scientific community has spoken time and again in a united voice that action must be taken as quickly as possible to counter climate change. Our Prime Minister does not agree. He believes, and I quote, that "The Kyoto protocol does not deal with critical environmental issues".

Will the Prime Minister admit that he was wrong or will he continue to mislead Canadians?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, clearly all the scientific evidence indicates that it is time for the government to take action. The member from Montreal stated that it is important to act as quickly as possible. As quickly as possible means now. As quickly as possible does not mean waiting 10 years. That is exactly what the Liberal Party did.

•(1455)

**Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the minister still refuses to answer.

[*English*]

Leading scientists say there is clear evidence the world is heating up. Kyoto is the only global effort to deal with this crisis, but the Prime Minister is intent on killing Kyoto. In fact, he said:

...the transfer of wealth, jobs and emissions to non-target countries virtually ensures that carbon dioxide emissions will increase under the Kyoto Protocol.

Was the Prime Minister misleading Canadians then, or is he misleading Canadians now?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I think the Liberal Party has a lot to contribute to the discussion in this place on the environment. I am prepared to show

Liberal members some of those contributions, and I quote: "I think our party has got into a mess on the environment". That is what the deputy leader of the Liberal Party said. "We'll clean up Kazakstan, but we won't clean up downtown Toronto". That is what the deputy leader of the Liberal Party said. He also said, "We didn't get it done".

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we have asked the government 15 questions and not received one single answer.

The international scientific community meeting in Paris is unanimous. It is sounding the alarm as to the seriousness of climate change. Yet the Prime Minister continues to act like an ostrich. He said, "No, what I am supportive of is, frankly, not ratifying the Kyoto agreement and not implementing it."

Will the Prime Minister admit that he was wrong to say this or will he continue to mislead Canadians?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is very important for Canada to assume its responsibilities and to reduce greenhouse gases in our country as quickly as possible. That does not mean as quickly as possible within 10 years. This government has put in place a bill to regulate industries, not only with regard to greenhouse gases but also with regard to air quality, a problem that the leader of the opposition says does not exist in Canada.

\* \* \*

**TRANSPORT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNITIES**

**Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, while negotiations between the department of transport, infrastructure and communities and Canadian National about maintaining the Quebec bridge drag on, rust is destroying this architectural jewel, on the eve of the 400th anniversary of the founding of Quebec City.

Does the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities plan to make good on the promise the Prime Minister made during the last election campaign and do what is needed so that the Quebec bridge is presentable when Quebec City celebrates its 400th anniversary?

**Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question. Of course, he is giving me an opportunity to talk about all the things our political party has done in the past year, especially at the airport, especially regarding the Massif de la Petite-Rivière-Saint-François. I am waiting for the hon. member to tell us whether or not this is going ahead.

With regard to the Quebec bridge, we are still looking at the options. Once we have reached a decision, we will announce it publicly.

*Oral Questions*

**Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, since 2004, the Mont-Joli airport has had no equipment allowing planes to land in fog. This is having a serious impact on economic activity throughout the region.

Can the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, who has responsibility for air safety and air service in the regions, tell us how he plans to get NAV CANADA to review its decision to cut back its air traffic control services?

**Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is well aware that for several years now, NAV CANADA has reported to neither this House nor the government. It is an independent agency. With regard to the issue the member raises, we believe that the safety of not only the people who use this airport, but passengers and other people, is protected.

\* \* \*

**THE ENVIRONMENT**

**Hon. Raymond Simard (Saint Boniface, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, although the international scientific community unanimously agrees that the Kyoto protocol is the only viable means to address climate change, the Prime Minister still does not get it. He believes, and I quote, “Kyoto does virtually nothing to deal with pollution and to deal with the quality of the air that we breathe. Let’s forget about this unworkable treaty.... Kyoto’s never going to be passed.”

Will the Prime Minister admit that he was wrong to say that or will he continue to mislead the public?

• (1500)

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is very important for Canada to assume its responsibilities, not just here in Canada, but around the world, in order to reduce greenhouse gases. Unfortunately, greenhouse gases have increased every year during the past 13 long years. This government was the first government to introduce a bill in this House to take serious action, to act within our industrial sectors. With this and with other efforts, we will achieve over the next few years what the previous government failed to achieve in 13 years.

\* \* \*

[English]

**SENATE TENURE LEGISLATION**

**Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, for eight months, the Liberal majority in the Senate has been blocking Bill S-4, the bill to establish eight year fixed terms for senators.

We had all hoped this obstructionism would end. Now there is a new Liberal leader who claims that he supports fixed terms for senators. Instead, the new Leader of the Opposition has taken office and Liberal obstructionism has become even worse.

Yesterday, the Liberal Senate caucus voted to adjourn early in order to prevent debate beginning on Bill S-4 and, just within the past hour, they again adjourned debate rather than allowing debate to begin on the bill.

Will the Minister for Democratic Reform explain to Canadians the importance of Bill S-4?

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am puzzled by the unelected Liberal Senate’s continued, almost year long, filibuster and its refusal to consider the proposal to limit Senate terms to eight years instead of the potentially possible 45 years they are now.

By obstructing and adjourning debate every day, the Liberal senators are not just defying the will of Canadians, they are defying the will of their own leader. I do not know why the senators want to make their own leader look so weak but I am actually not surprised that he just cannot get it done.

\* \* \*

**THE ENVIRONMENT**

**Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of the Environment.

In the Northwest Territories, all people, including aboriginal leaders, are concerned about record low water levels and how the oil sands are affecting the waterways downstream.

In 1997 the Mackenzie River Basin master agreement was signed. It was supposed to result in agreements between all jurisdictions in the Mackenzie watershed. In 10 years the federal government has dropped the ball and we have seen no action to implement these agreements.

Will the minister support slowing down oil sands development until these agreements are in place to protect Canadians?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we are tremendously concerned about the quality of water in this country.

I am very pleased to work with the member opposite and to hear his concerns.

I can tell the member opposite that I did have the opportunity this morning to meet with some 15 representatives of first nations and to hear their concerns about some northern environmental issues.

This government is always willing to work with members on all sides of the House and with first nations on issues that are important to the quality of our water and our environment.

\* \* \*

**ENERGY STRATEGY**

**Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Natural Resources.

*Government Orders*

The provinces have been calling for the creation of an east-west electricity grid. Such a grid would increase Canada's energy security and would be an important element in an overall energy strategy for Canada, something that even the oil companies have been asking for. These calls match with the creation of a powerful cabinet subcommittee on energy security and with the minister's comments of 2006 when he said, "Canada's energy strategy is key to North America's economy."

When will the minister make good on his promise and bring forward to Parliament a Canadian energy strategy to give Canadians a secure and clean energy future?

**Hon. Gary Lunn (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that the provinces are looking at expanding the electricity connections across the country.

I can inform the House that the Council of Energy Ministers right now is looking at this very issue and I am very confident we can make progress on this file.

It is also important that we put clean energy on the grid, which is why this government, in its first year, committed \$2 billion to provide clean energy, to put 4,000 megawatts of clean energy on the grid after the old Liberal government, which claims to be holier than thou, did nothing for 13 years. Putting on a green ribbon does not reduce greenhouse gases. It takes action—

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for York West.

\* \* \*

**THE ENVIRONMENT**

**Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the world scientific community is about to release a report that is unequivocal about the growing climate change crisis.

However, the Prime Minister, as we all know, has never believed in Kyoto. In fact, he has said:

"We're gearing up now for the biggest struggle our party has faced since you entrusted me with the leadership. I'm talking about the "battle of Kyoto"—our campaign to block the job-killing, economy-destroying Kyoto Accord."

This is disgraceful.

Was the Prime Minister misleading Canadians then, or is he misleading them now?

• (1505)

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we believe that reducing greenhouse gas emissions is tremendously important, which is why we intend to act where the previous government did not act. It had its chance to act and it failed.

For 10 years the Liberals sat on their hands, did more studies, had more conferences and achieved nothing.

This government will succeed where the previous Liberal government failed.

\* \* \*

**ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS**

**Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the failed record of the former Liberal government, as it

relates to aboriginal affairs and northern development, is well-known to all Canadians. That fact has been made clear over and over again.

We are now one month into 2007. Could the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development inform the House what has been done to increase employment and economic development for first nations and for Canadians in the north?

**Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his excellent and hard work on the aboriginal affairs committee.

Since January, a number of announcements have been made that specifically improved the lives of aboriginal Canadians: \$2.5 million in Dryden in northern Ontario; \$18 million to upgrade power infrastructure in Kenora; in the Primrose Lake communities to support the Métis communities, a \$15 million economic development fund; and in Yukon, \$10 million to support the construction of sewage and other road infrastructure.

This government with respect to aboriginal Canadians continues to get things done.

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**GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

[*English*]

**CRIMINAL CODE**

The House resumed from January 30 consideration of the motion.

**The Speaker:** It being 3:07 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at report stage of Bill C-26.

Call in the members.

• (1515)

[*Translation*]

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

(*Division No. 97*)

**YEAS**

Members

Abbott  
Albrecht  
Allen  
Ambrose  
Anderson  
Atamanenko  
Bains  
Barnes  
Beaumier  
Bell (Vancouver Island North)  
Bernier  
Bevington  
Black  
Blaney  
Boschoff  
Breitkreuz  
Brown (Oakville)  
Brown (Barrie)  
Calkins  
Cannis  
Carrie  
Casson

Ablonczy  
Alghabra  
Allison  
Anders  
Angus  
Bagnell  
Baird  
Batters  
Bélanger  
Benoit  
Bevilacqua  
Bezan  
Blackburn  
Bonin  
Boucher  
Brison  
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)  
Byrne  
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)  
Cannon (Pontiac)  
Casey  
Chan

Charlton  
Chow  
Clement  
Comartin  
Crowder  
Cullen (Etobicoke North)  
D'Amours  
Davies  
Del Mastro  
Dewar  
Dhalla  
Doshanji  
Dryden  
Easter  
Eyking  
Finley  
Flaherty  
Galipeau  
Godfrey  
Goldring  
Gourde  
Grewal  
Guergis  
Harper  
Harvey  
Hearn  
Hill  
Holland  
Ignatieff  
Jean  
Julian  
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)  
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)  
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)  
Komarnicki  
Lake  
Layton  
Lee  
Lukiwski  
Lunney  
Mackay (Central Nova)  
Malhi  
Manning  
Marleau  
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)  
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)  
Mathysen  
Mayes  
McDonough  
McGuire  
McTeague  
Merrifield  
Mills  
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)  
Moore (Fundy Royal)  
Murphy (Charlottetown)  
Neville  
Norlock  
Obhrai  
Owen  
Paradis  
Pearson  
Petit  
Prentice  
Priddy  
Rajotte  
Redman  
Reid  
Ritz  
Rodriguez  
Russell  
Savoie  
Scheer  
Scott  
Shipleay  
Silva  
Simms  
Smith  
Sorenson  
St. Denis  
Steckle  
Storseth  
Sweet  
Telegdi

Chong  
Christopherson  
Coderre  
Cotler  
Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)  
Cuzner  
Davidson  
Day  
Devolin  
Dhaliwal  
Dion  
Doyle  
Dykstra  
Emerson  
Fast  
Fitzpatrick  
Fletcher  
Gallant  
Godin  
Goodyear  
Graham  
Guarnieri  
Hanger  
Harris  
Hawn  
Hiebert  
Hinton  
Hubbard  
Jaffer  
Jennings  
Kadis  
Karetak-Lindell  
Keeper  
Khan  
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)  
Lauzon  
LeBlanc  
Lemieux  
Lunn  
MacAulay  
MacKenzie  
Maloney  
Mark  
Marston  
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)  
Masse  
Mathews  
McCallum  
McGuinty  
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)  
Menzies  
Miller  
Minna  
Nash  
Nicholson  
O'Connor  
Oda  
Pacetti  
Patry  
Peterson  
Poilievre  
Preston  
Proulx  
Ratansi  
Regan  
Richardson  
Robillard  
Rota  
Savage  
Scarpaleggia  
Schellenberger  
Sgro  
Siksay  
Simard  
Skelton  
Solberg  
St. Amand  
Stanton  
Stoffer  
Strahl  
Szabo  
Temelkovski

Thibault (West Nova)  
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### Points of Order

Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)  
Toews  
Trost  
Van Kesteren  
Vellacott  
Volpe  
Wappel  
Warkentin  
Watson  
Williams  
Yelich

### NAYS

#### Members

André  
Bachand  
Bellavance  
Blais  
Bouchard  
Brunelle  
Carrier  
DeBellefeuille  
Deschamps  
Faille  
Gagnon  
Gauthier  
Guay  
Kotto  
Laframboise  
Lavallée  
Lessard  
Lussier  
Ménard (Hochelaga)  
Mourani  
Ouellet  
Perron  
Plamondon  
St-Cyr  
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)  
Vincent- — 50

Asselin  
Barbot  
Bigras  
Bonsant  
Bourgeois  
Cardin  
Crête  
Demers  
Duceppe  
Freeman  
Gaudet  
Gravel  
Guimond  
Laforest  
Lalonde  
Lemay  
Lévesque  
Malou  
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)  
Nadeau  
Paquette  
Picard  
Roy  
St-Hilaire

### PAIRED

#### Members

Bruinooge — 2  
Loubier- — 2

**The Speaker:** I declare the motion carried.

\* \* \*

[English]

### POINTS OF ORDER

#### COMMENTS BY MINISTER OF NATIONAL DEFENCE

**Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC):**

Mr. Speaker, I would like to apologize to the member for New Westminster—Coquitlam for any of my previous words that may have offended her.

● (1520)

#### ORAL QUESTIONS

**Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, during question period the Prime Minister was asked 18 times whether he was misleading Canadians then or misleading them now on climate change. In answering those questions the Minister of the Environment continued misleading the House of Commons and Canadians by taking out of context comments I have made in the past as a professional. This is precisely the kind of conduct that Canadians have come to count on from the new government.

*Routine Proceedings*

I would ask the Minister of the Environment to table the documents. I would ask all Canadians to understand these comments were taken out of context.

I would ask the Prime Minister again to answer the question as to whether he was misleading Canadians then or whether he is misleading them now.

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to give the references for my comments in question period.

When I said, “if Canada does ratify Kyoto, the cost would be as much as \$40 billion a year”, that was from the *Globe and Mail* of January 29.

When I said that the Liberal member for Ottawa South said that the Liberal Party was involved in a “medium sized car crash during the recent federal election”, that came from the *National Post* of March 23, 2006.

When I said “but when people see the costs of Kyoto, they are going to scream”, that came from *Canadian Speeches*, January 1, 2003, volume 16, issue 6.

**The Speaker:** I do not know that we are going far with this. It sounds to me like debate.

Is the hon. member for Ottawa South rising on another point?

**Mr. David McGuinty:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the Minister of the Environment for his extensive detailed research into my background. I thank him very much.

I would remind him on this point of order that the kind of conduct he is pursuing is conduct unbecoming of a Minister of the Environment. He should understand that Canadians are watching; his constituents and my constituents are watching. This does not advance the cause of climate change one iota. In fact, what the Minister of the Environment should do is prevail upon his boss, the Prime Minister, to answer the question.

**The Speaker:** I do not think we are on a point of order here, so we will move on.

\* \* \*

**SPONSORED TRAVEL**

**The Speaker:** Pursuant to Section 15(3) of the Conflict of Interest Code for members of the House of Commons, it is my duty to lay upon the table the list of all sponsored travel by members for the year 2006 as provided by the Ethics Commissioner.

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**ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS**

[English]

**COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE**

## PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

**Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 109, I wish to table two

copies of the government's response to the recommendation of the eighth report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts concerning chapter 7 of the May 2006 report of the Auditor General of Canada: Acquisition of Leased Office Space.

\* \* \*

**INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS**

**Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the 14th annual bilateral meeting of the Canada-Japan Interparliamentary Group held in Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka in Japan from November 12 to 17, 2006.

\* \* \*

**COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE**

## PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

**Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present the 28th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding the membership of committees of the House. If the House gives its consent, I intend to move concurrence in the 28th report later this day.

## HEALTH

**Mr. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to present, in both official languages, the fifth report of the Standing Committee on Health entitled, “Proposed Regulations under Section 8 of the Assisted Human Reproduction Act”.

\* \* \*

●(1525)

**EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT**

**Hon. Andy Scott (Fredericton, Lib.)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-396, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (self-employed artists and authors).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce this private member's bill because one of the largest contributions made to Canadian society is made by artists and authors. Like school teachers and child care workers, I do not think that artists are valued nearly enough, particularly as measured by their remuneration.

Artists also suffer another disadvantage in Canadian society. As most of them are self-employed, they do not have access to benefits that are available to people who are employed, such as maternity benefits, sickness benefits and income benefits as are contained in the employment insurance program. There are ways the employment insurance program could be modified to allow for self-employed artists to have access to those kinds of benefits. I think they are critical to them.

During the last election campaign we had an arts and culture debate, as we have had in the last four election campaigns in Fredericton, and this was the principal issue.

I am pleased to introduce the bill as a way of remedying the situation.



*Routine Proceedings*

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

\* \* \*

**COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE**

## PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

**Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, if the House gives its consent, I move that the 28th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs concerning membership of the committees of the House, presented to the House earlier today, be concurred in.

(Motion agreed to)

\* \* \*

**PETITIONS**

## AGE OF CONSENT

**Hon. Andy Scott (Fredericton, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table a petition signed by a number of my constituents in the Sudbury County area of the riding of Fredericton.

The petitioners call upon the House to protect our children from adult sexual predators. They state that the age of sexual consent should be raised by the House of Commons from 14 to 18 years of age. They feel no adult should engage in sexual activity with a child under the age of 18.

**Ms. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to present a petition on behalf of my constituents in Calgary—Nose Hill.

The petitioners are concerned about being able to protect their children from sexual predators. They point out that studies show that 14 and 15 year olds are most vulnerable to sexual exploitation, including recruitment from pimps. Therefore, the petitioners ask the government and Parliament to take all measures necessary to immediately raise the age of sexual protection from 14 to 16.

[Translation]

## CANADIAN FIREARMS REGISTRY

**Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition in favour of keeping the Canadian firearms registry. This petition has been signed by students in the social work program at the Rimouski Cégep, who feel that the registry plays a vital role.

[English]

## MUSEUMS

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am very honoured to rise in the House and present a petition signed by people from all across this good country, including such famous Canadian centres as Wadena, Saskatchewan; Minnedosa, Manitoba; Trois-Rivières, Quebec; the wonderful community of Iroquois Falls, Ontario, which happens to be in my riding; Bridgewater, Nova Scotia; Holy Cross, Nova Scotia; and Harris, Saskatchewan.

The petitioners are concerned about the decline in support for museum funding across this country. In fact, with the cuts that were visited upon our nation's museums, every small town in this country

has felt the terrible blow laid to them by the Conservative government.

The petitioners ask us as members of Parliament to rise to the occasion to recognize the value of museums, to recognize the value of heritage and culture, things the government seems to have missed out on. I am not editorializing here but this seems to be the message I am getting from these petitioners. They call upon us to work together to restore the museums assistance funding and recognize the value of our Canadian museums.

● (1530)

## MARRIAGE

**Ms. Tina Keeper (Churchill, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present two petitions from the community of the town of Churchill, Manitoba to address the issue of marriage.

## HEALTH

**Ms. Tina Keeper (Churchill, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I also present a third petition from the community of Easterville, in northern Manitoba. The community is seriously dealing with a critical health issue of addiction. The petitioners call upon the government to help them establish a treatment centre.

## PUBLIC SAFETY OFFICERS COMPENSATION FUND

**Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36 I am pleased to table in the House two petitions. The first petition has to do with public safety officers, namely, police officers and firefighters.

The petitioners call to the attention of the House that our police officers and firefighters place their lives at risk each and every day when they perform their duties and that the employment benefits they often receive are insufficient to compensate the families of those who are killed in the line of duty. Also, they point out that the public mourns the loss when any of these police officers or firefighters lose their life in the line of duty and they would like to have an opportunity to support the families in some tangible way.

They therefore call upon Parliament to establish a fund, known as the public safety officers compensation fund, for the benefit of families of public safety officers who are killed in the line of duty.

## STEM CELL RESEARCH

**Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the second petition is on the matter of stem cells, flowing from the reproductive technologies legislation with which we have dealt.

The petitioners, again from my riding of Mississauga South, point out that hundreds of thousands of Canadians suffer from debilitating illnesses and diseases, such as Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, diabetes, cancer, multiple sclerosis and spinal cord injury. They also point out that ethical stem cell research has shown encouraging potential to provide cures and therapies for these illnesses and diseases, and also that non-embryonic stem cells, also known as adult stem cells, have shown significant research progress without the immune rejection or ethical problems associated with embryonic stem cells.

*Government Orders*

The petitioner call upon Parliament to focus its legislative support on adult stem cell research to find the cures and therapies necessary to treat the illnesses and diseases of Canadians.

\* \* \*

**QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER**

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

**The Speaker:** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

\* \* \*

**MOTIONS FOR PAPERS**

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I ask that all notices of motions for the production of papers be allowed to stand.

**The Speaker:** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Speaker:** I wish to inform the House that because of the deferred recorded division government orders will be extended by 12 minutes.

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**GOVERNMENT ORDERS****CANADA ELECTIONS ACT**

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-31, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act and the Public Service Employment Act, as reported (with amendment) from the committee.

[*English*]

## SPEAKER'S RULING

**The Speaker:** There are nine motions in amendment standing on the notice paper for the report stage of Bill C-31.

[*Translation*]

Motion No. 3 will not be selected by the Chair, as it could have been presented in committee.

[*English*]

All remaining motions have been examined and the Chair is satisfied that they meet the guidelines expressed in the note to Standing Order 76.1(5), regarding the selection of motions in amendment at report stage.

Motions Nos. 1, 2 and 4 to 9 will be grouped for debated and voted upon according to the voting pattern available at the table.

[*Translation*]

I will now put Motions Nos. 1, 2 and 4 through 9 to the House.

● (1535)

[*English*]

## MOTIONS IN AMENDMENT

**Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP)** moved:

Motion No. 1

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 18.

Motion No. 2

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 21.

Motion No. 4

That Bill C-31, in Clause 22, be amended by deleting lines 28 to 42 on page 10.

Motion No. 5

That Bill C-31, in Clause 26, be amended by replacing lines 38 and 39 on page 11 and lines 1 to 18 on page 12 with the following:

“26. Subsection 161(6) of the Act is replaced”

Motion No. 6

That Bill C-31, in Clause 28, be amended:

(a) by replacing line 32 on page 12 with the following:

“28. (1) Paragraph 162(f) of the Act is”

(b) by replacing lines 37 to 42 on page 12 and lines 1 to 11 on page 13 with the following:

“(2) Section 162 of the Act is amended by striking out the word “and” at the end of paragraph (i) and by adding the following after paragraph (i):”

Motion No. 7

That Bill C-31, in Clause 30, be amended by replacing lines 25 to 43 on page 13 with the following:

“30. Section 169 of the Act is amended by”

Motion No. 8

That Bill C-31 be amended by deleting Clause 33.

Motion No. 9

That Bill C-31, in Clause 38, be amended by replacing lines 31 to 40 on page 15 and lines 1 to 6 on page 16 with the following:

“38. (1) Subsection 489(2) of the Act is amended by adding the following after paragraph (a.1):

(a.2) contravenes subsection 161(7) (vouchee acting as voucher);

(2) Subsection 489(2) of the Act is”

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-31. I want to step back and talk a bit about how we arrived at where we are.

Bill C-31, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act and the Public Service Employment Act came from a committee report that was commissioned by all parties initially to look at the previous election and how it had been conducted. People had some concerns about how that election and previous elections had been conducted. This report was boiled down and turned into this bill.

Unbeknownst to many people, including myself, the bill was put forward without those of us in the House and on committee understanding that we were going to take on how people voted, the most fundamental aspect of our democracy.

We heard from numerous witnesses in committee about their concerns with this legislation. The amendments that we have put forward deal with those concerns as well as the concerns of many others who spoke to us in our communities.

*Government Orders*

The concerns expressed by witnesses and people who we spoke to in our communities were about the requirements for photo ID. Initially, many people said that was fine. However, those without photo identification would be required to have people vouch for them, but an individual who vouched for one person could not vouch for another, and they considered this restrictive. Witnesses who supported this amendment and had those concerns spoke from the perspective of those who worked with our homeless, our most vulnerable, and our students, who some would say are part of our most transient population because of the fact that they move back and forth from their homes to their schools numerous times.

We have tried to encourage both of these groups over the last number of years to exercise their franchise, to vote. Sadly, what we have in front of us are barriers to that. Why? Now they are required not only to have photo identification, but different tiers are being used. If they are unable to produce photo ID, then they are required to produce other pieces of identification with vouchers.

Vouchers is a topic of great concern for myself and my colleagues in our party. They will now be required to have someone who is already on the voter's list vouch on their behalf. This can only be done once. We know from people who were witnesses at committee that this is impossible in many cases simply because of the populations with which they deal.

If I can reference the homeless population. It has only been recent that we have been able to organize systems in our country allowing homeless people the opportunity to exercise their franchise. That was not done by government, but by the people who work in our communities. They took this on themselves. They were not paid by government exclusively to do this. They saw the need, the benefit and the responsibility as citizens to ensure that our most vulnerable citizens were not disenfranchised. These people did the work that some of us in government should perhaps have done. They took this on themselves.

They are confused and angry because they believe Bill C-31 will undo all the good work they have done by way of organizing people who do not have addresses because they are homeless. They ensure the homeless have an address, usually a drop-in centre or homeless shelter, and they are able to vouch on their behalf. The bill as proposed, without our amendments, would mean that those who work with the homeless would not have the opportunity to vouch for more than one person if they themselves were on the voter's list. This would be the restriction.

We put forward an amendment that would allow someone to vouch for more than one person. Also, we would have an opportunity to use a system that works in British Columbia. There would be an opportunity for them to swear that people were in fact who they said they were, and this could be tracked and accountable and would not be open to exploitation.

● (1540)

Further amendments that we have made have to do with privacy issues. I want to underline the concerns that we have, which I brought forward in committee.

According to the bill as written, electors will now have their birth date information given to Elections Canada. This birth date

information will be passed on to people who are working in the polling stations for Elections Canada.

I do not have to tell you, Mr. Speaker, about the concerns people have had recently about privacy and personal information. We have seen exploitation of the privacy of people recently with companies. We have seen stories about the information of people being used and abused.

What we have in front of us is a bill that would take the birth date information of citizens and that information would be circulated among all those who work on behalf of Elections Canada. I am not concerned about the propriety in the trust of the employees of Elections Canada. I am concerned about how this information can leak out. We have 308 ridings with I do not know how many different polling stations. This kind of privacy needs to be protected. That is why we put forward an amendment to remove the requirement to have birth date information shared with Elections Canada because of the privacy factor.

When we look at ensuring we have legitimacy and trust in the election system, there are other ways of dealing with that issue, other than sharing the privacy of one's birth date. I know many people in my riding are aghast at the fact that their birth date information would be shared with Elections Canada.

What is even more egregious is the fact that we now will share, according to the amendment put forward by the Bloc and supported by the Liberal Party, this birth date information with all political parties. For what reason? We know what it is. It is so they can exploit it and use it for their own purposes. It has nothing to do with checking the verification of the voter in front of them. It is an opportunity, to be polite, for political parties to use personal information for their own purposes. Why else would a political party need one's birth date information?

We put forward amendments on birth date information and the sharing thereof. We do not believe Elections Canada should have it to share with everyone. We most assuredly, and I think there would be a charter challenge on this, do not want political parties to have birth date information.

Consider this. In my riding of Ottawa Centre we have up to eight to ten different candidates and parties running. This would mean that each and every one of those parties would have access to the private information of each and every elector. How do we ensure that this information will not be shared with others for purposes other than to verify if a voter is genuine?

I implore other members of the House to support our amendments to ensure that there is privacy protection. When they find out that Parliament will pass a bill that will open up their private information to not only Elections Canada but to political parties, I think most people will be aghast. I am sure they do not know that at this point.

*Government Orders*

That is why we have put forward these amendments. I hope for the support and hopefully a change in the minds of the Bloc and the Liberals, who at committee said that it was fine for political parties to have birth date information shared among themselves. That makes no sense. I am sure others in the House, now that they have learned about this, will want to support our amendment to remove that clause of the bill, which allows political parties to have this kind of private information of citizens.

Finally, I think if we are unable to have these amendments go forward, it will be very difficult for us to support the bill. I look forward to questions from my colleagues.

● (1545)

**Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am going to point out some of the changes made in committee that I think substantially address the concerns of the hon. member from the New Democratic Party. I will be frank in saying that I am a bit surprised these concerns are being raised by the NDP, given the considerable measures that the committee went to in its work to ensure that the franchise would be as open as possible to all Canadians, and indeed, more open than it currently is in many respects.

The member mentioned a number of disadvantaged groups. He mentioned the homeless specifically. I want to point out some of the things that were done in committee to ensure that a number of groups that might be disenfranchised, specifically the homeless, are taken care of.

One of the problems for people who move residences frequently, and the homeless obviously would fit that category, is that voters lists tend to fall out of date. We asked as an administrative measure, not a legislative one, and we had an assurance from the Chief Electoral Officer for it, that the Chief Electoral Officer carry out more aggressive enumeration in areas where there is a high turnover of populations, especially in certain areas. In response to a question from me, he said he will carry out enumeration in areas where there are high levels of homelessness. That should do a substantial amount.

We also made sure that pieces of ID are added to the list of ID that can be used for voting. For example, special provisions were made for aboriginal identification, for student cards and for bus passes to ensure that these groups are not excluded from the franchise.

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to my colleague's answer. It does not address the concerns that I raised in my comments. I was at committee with him. The witnesses stated very clearly that the people they deal with would not have access to the identification he just mentioned. He knows that the change in the bill means that these people often will not be able to find people to vouch for them.

I am a little puzzled as to his take on this. Bus passes often are not something that someone who is homeless has access to. A bus pass is a piece of identification that normally would require an address on it, so I am not satisfied with his take on how things happened in committee.

I have to also touch on the idea of enumeration. We asked, and we were very clear about it even before this bill, that we have universal

enumeration for universal suffrage, nothing less, nothing more. We know about the problems we had when we went to the centralized list. People were left off the list, usually in ridings like my own and other urban ridings where there is a lot of turnover. The fact of the matter is that we have not had assurances. In fact, when we asked for universal enumeration for each election, with people going door to door, that was not accepted. With all due respect to my colleague, it is not enough. An assurance from the Chief Electoral Officer to do that was something we had before.

**Hon. Stephen Owen (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his presentation and the hard work that he has put in on the committee work on this bill.

He mentioned that he heard no purpose given to us at committee for having dates of birth given not to electoral parties but to electoral officials. Of course, the date of birth information is very valuable. If an electoral official has a doubt about someone's identity, it can connect them to the age. It may be someone with the same name as their parent or child or a same name of two unrelated people. It seems to me that it is a unique identifier available to electoral officials when there is doubt, not to be spread about, but to add confirmation to the person's identity.

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** Mr. Speaker, I think what my colleague missed in my comments were the amendments put forward by the Bloc and supported unanimously by his party to share that information with political parties.

I cannot fathom the reason for political parties needing to have birthdate information. My colleague suggests that maybe it is so they can send out birthday cards, but the purpose here is verification, and the bill calls for photo ID. The idea of sharing birthdate information for all political parties is worrisome for some of us, but as for going to the extent of sharing it with all political parties, the Bloc and the Liberals were the ones who pushed through that amendment. It was not in the bill.

Let me be very clear. This is about political parties having that information. I know that in the hon. member's previous employment as an ombudsman he would have been deeply concerned that this kind of information, which is private information from my perspective, would be shared. I hope he supports our amendment.

● (1550)

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak today to the amendments proposed at the report stage of Bill C-31.

This is a bill that provides real, tangible results for Canadians. Without a well-functioning electoral machinery, of course, our democracy simply will not work. All hon. members will agree that the machinery must be regularly maintained, updated and renewed. That is what Bill C-31 seeks to do. It is in fact an ideal example of how to go about doing that.

The genesis of the bill was a parliamentary committee report to which the government responded with legislative action. We have worked with the other parties in fine-tuning the bill after hearing from a number of witnesses at the committee.

*Government Orders*

I point out that while we opposed certain changes that occurred to the bill at committee, that is, our Conservative members opposed them, we are now prepared to support Bill C-31 in its current form. A big reason behind this is that we think this bill has benefited from a multi-party degree of support, which is important in a bill of this nature. For that reason, Conservatives are not going to support the proposed NDP amendments that are before us today.

Before elaborating on some of the benefits of the bill, I want to express my thanks and gratitude to my predecessor, the member for Niagara Falls, the Minister of Justice. Through his work as the former government House leader and Minister for Democratic Reform, we are now in a position to advance this important bill, which was, I repeat, the product of cooperation and collaboration in this Parliament.

Bill C-31 is just one part of our very robust democratic reform agenda, an agenda based on bringing accountability and integrity to the institutions and processes of governance.

We of course know about Senate Bill S-4, which remains mired in the Senate. Again today the Liberal senators refused to debate it. It has been almost a year since they have gone about refusing to debate it and have filibustered. Their own leader says he supports term limits for senators, yet that bill remains mired there. I cannot understand why Liberals want to make their leader look so weak, but I am not surprised that it is happening.

That is just one part of our agenda. At least on Bill C-31 we think we can see results very soon.

With regard to some of the amendments before us, it is important to note that the bill implemented virtually all of the parliamentary committee's recommendations in its report. In particular, it took up the committee's call to do more to combat voter fraud. That is really the core of Bill C-31: to protect the integrity of our electoral system.

[*Translation*]

The two major recommendations made by the committee—and included in Bill C-31—were as follows: to confirm the identity of voters, record their date of birth on the new official lists; establish a standard process for identifying voters.

This same committee reported, on December 13, 2006, on Bill C-31 to which some amendments were also made. Once again, the committee emphasized the importance of these two specific aspects of the bill. Motions in amendment moved by the member for Ottawa Centre attempt to reverse the committee's decision in this regard.

[*English*]

I urge all other members to join me in opposing these amendments so that we can avoid further delays to this very important bill. Let us address them.

First is the date of birth on the list of electors: The first amendment proposed by the member for Ottawa Centre proposes to remove that provision. At committee, we opposed that as well. However, it is now there in the bill and, as I said, in the spirit of cooperation, we are prepared to support it at this stage so that the bill may move forward. Also, we do agree that it can go some distance to assisting in combating voter fraud and ensuring that people's identification is what they say it is.

Second is voter identification. The balance of the NDP amendments aim to gut the provisions of the bill that require the provision of identification for someone to vote and, in so doing, effectively undermine the central objective of the bill, which is to ensure the integrity of the electoral process.

Let us take, for example, Motions Nos. 2, 4 and 9. On the requirement for voter identification and the ability for polling officials to challenge voters for identification, both of those provisions were part of the key recommendations of the thirteenth report of the procedure and House affairs committee, aimed specifically at dealing with the potential for voter fraud. There were no dissenting opinions to that report, so now we are hearing from the NDP a new position compared to what took place in the original report.

Second, as I said, addressing voter fraud is the core reason for Bill C-31. If we were to remove those provisions, we would weaken it. In terms of requiring identification, the Canada Elections Act already requires voters to provide identification if they wish to register. However, there are no guidelines on what kind of identification is acceptable. Bill C-31 establishes what constitutes acceptable identification by implementing the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs on this matter.

Bill C-31 will require voters to show one piece of government-issued photo identification with name and address, or two pieces of identification establishing identity and residence. If the voter does not have identification, Bill C-31 allows the voter to take an oath and be vouched for.

These motions for amendment being proposed today will take us back to a realm of uncertainty and uneven practice as to the types of identification that can be used. The government strongly opposes these motions.

Simply put, we have ample opportunity for anyone who seeks to vote legitimately to do so. The net effect of the amendments being proposed by the New Democratic Party here—and I am surprised after the positive experience of the NDP in supporting the federal Accountability Act that the NDP would propose such amendments—would be to open up loopholes for those who wish to take advantage and those who wish to commit voter fraud.

That is what the effect of these amendments would be. That is why I am surprised that they come from the New Democratic Party, which I thought was concerned with seeing some preservation of the integrity of the process. That is what we are trying to do with the bill.

In conclusion, the potential for voter fraud hurts the integrity of our electoral system and undermines public confidence in the voting process. In fact, every time someone votes fraudulently, it undermines the legitimate say of every other voter. We all lose a little when that fraud takes place. That is why we cannot support amendments that create the opportunity for such fraud.

*Government Orders*

This bill provides better tools to poll officials to confirm the identity and eligibility of voters. One way is through the addition of the date of birth, which is in that amendment.

Another way, which came out of the committee, is to require voters to show identification or be vouched for before voting, and to systemize the identification required before registering at polls so there is certainty, no ambiguity and no opportunity for fraud and cheating.

The third way is to allow poll officials or candidates to challenge the eligibility of potential voters and require them to affirm their eligibility in writing: to say who they are and prove who they are. I think most Canadians actually think that is what we have to do now when we vote. I do not think many people are offended by the fact that when they say their name is X they must actually prove they are X. I think that is what Canadians expect. I think that is what Canadians hope for.

There are many who come to me after voting in an election and say they are amazed by the fact that anybody could have walked up and said they were Jane Doe, or by the fact that their vote could have been taken away because nobody actually asked them for ID. That troubles people. That is why we need to have those voter identification provisions.

• (1555)

Each of these tools would be removed from the bill under the proposed amendments from the New Democratic Party. Bill C-31 and these features in particular were the result of a non-partisan, multi-party recommendation of a parliamentary committee of the House that was seeking to improve the integrity of the electoral process.

These motions for amendment would reverse that work and I hope members will join me in opposing them.

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to invite the government House leader to come with me to the northern part of my riding where I do regular clinics and fill out applications for birth certificates, social insurance numbers, and health cards for first nation communities in Kashechewan, Atawapaskat, Moose Factory, Moosonee and Ogoki.

I am amazed at the number of people in these communities who do not have access to the kind of identification we are talking about. They have been simply left off the political map of Canada. These are the isolated first nation communities of course with the lowest levels of voting.

When we are talking about ensuring that people are able to exercise their democratic franchise, the member opposite is accusing us of supporting electoral fraud. I certainly take exception to that because I have people in my region who are trying to vote, who do not have addresses because they are not listed on band addresses, whose children have not had birth certificates, and whose government officials do not come up and fill out the most basic forms that every other Canadian takes for granted.

We have some serious problems with this bill because we want to ensure that these people are not disenfranchised. I would be more than happy to invite the hon. government House leader to come with

me and fill out some of these forms and he could see some of the problems we are up against. The issue, for example, of the latest census on the James Bay coast was abysmal. It was done poorly. We are dealing time and time again with people who are simply not in the records of this country.

• (1600)

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** Mr. Speaker, I am perplexed by the reference of the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay to the census. The census of course is not what determines the voter's list. The voter's list is determined by registration.

I think most Canadians believe that the provisions for voter identification are not onerous. I think it would be a positive thing if people do not have that identification to get it and I encourage the member for Timmins—James Bay to help his constituents if they have not.

However, I do not believe the member for Timmins—James Bay has actually read the bill as it has come out of committee because there is a special provision dealing with first nations. I myself have a first nations reserve in my constituency. I am familiar with the problems and the issues, but they seem to cope with them quite well in the case of my constituents.

However, there is a special provision that creates an additional opportunity for those from a first nations population that is not there for other Canadians. That provision states:

For the purposes of paragraph (2)(b), a document issued by the Government of Canada that certifies that a person is registered as an Indian under the Indian Act constitutes an authorized piece of identification.

There is a specific provision there taking into account in particular that they will not have to have that birth certificate. They will not have to fill out those forms, which I think is a good thing if the member can help them do it. They have a special provision just for that. I think that is a positive thing and I congratulate the committee for its foresight in including it.

**Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am very surprised at the government House leader's comments as well.

I would like him to come to Vancouver East where we have an incredible problem with voter registration and people being disenfranchised. More people will be disenfranchised as a result of this bill if it goes through without these amendments.

He says that people should prove that they are X. Actually, under the current provisions of Elections Canada, people do have to prove who they are. They can use a statutory declaration. They can have someone vouch for them in the community, so that it is known that they are who they are.

What the bill is doing and what the government is doing is actually removing that provision and making it so incredibly onerous for people to vote by having a single voucher, one person vouching for one elector in the same poll. This will completely remove people's ability to vote.

*Government Orders*

We have looked at this bill. When he talks about fraud, and this massive bill has to deal with fraud, I want to ask the minister to respond to the charge that we make. By putting forth this bill and voting for it, he will actually be disenfranchising thousands of people in communities like mine who rely on the system as it is now in order to vote. I would like the minister to come to my community so he can see that.

**Hon. Peter Van Loan:** Mr. Speaker, I have been to the member's constituency, so it is not news or a surprise to me. However, I can tell her that there is in the bill, and again I do not think she has read it, a provision that provides for vouching.

The only difference is that one person who might have bad intent would not be able to vouch for 250 people. For example, if there are 200 people at a homeless residence, there are 200 people who can vouch for someone else in that residence. There is no difficulty there. There is no challenge. There is ample opportunity for that to occur. No one would be disenfranchised, but it certainly limits the ability of one bad actor to commit large scale fraud and that is a positive thing for the integrity of the system.

• (1605)

**Hon. Stephen Owen (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with my hon. colleague, the member for Kitchener Centre.

Let me take a step back and look at Canada's responsibility internationally and the way that it has taken on that responsibility to serve as an advisor and monitor of elections over the last 40 or 50 years in newly democratizing countries around the world or countries coming out of conflict.

In the last two years alone a Canadian team of monitors have been in the Ukraine, the Palestinian Authority and Afghanistan. Electoral officials from Canada were training Iraqi electoral officials in Jordan and right now there is a team of Canadian election monitors, Canada Corps members, in Bangladesh, although unfortunately, because of continuing disputes in that area, its election is being delayed.

I was an election monitor in Nicaragua during the Contra civil war when it was a very dangerous thing for people to expose themselves by voting. I was in the mountains near the Honduras-Nicaraguan border area where the Contra were most effective. People were coming to school—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer):** I apologize to the hon. member for Vancouver Quadra but I want to clarify something. He indicated that he would be splitting his time with the member for Kitchener Centre. We are at report stage and, as such, he has a 10 minute slot with 5 minutes for questions and comments. Is he seeking unanimous consent of the House to allow him to split his time—

**Hon. Stephen Owen:** No, that is fine.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer):** —or will he take up the full 10 minutes?

**Hon. Stephen Owen:** Mr. Speaker, the standard we use in advising other countries in their electoral commissions and their electoral processes and in monitoring those elections is free and fair. Were the elections free and fair? When we say free, we are talking about the right of every adult person to vote, which is a charter right

in Canada. The fair side is equally important to the equation of having an election. Fairness means the integrity of the process.

We as legislators have a duty to ensure that there is integrity in the voter process, so that it will be fairly applied and available to Canadians. Hon. members opposite have spoken of marginalized communities. Of course that means they must be given every possible opportunity within the integrity of the system to vote. That is fairness. It is also fairness to ensure that fraud cannot be perpetrated. I suggest that is what this bill is intended to do.

We have had a long series of discussions and processes to get to this point, including the Chief Electoral Officer's report after the January 2006 election to the committee, our committee's report to the House, and the response of the government in Bill C-31.

The bill makes a number of improvements. It improves access for the disabled. There are more convenient locations for advanced polls. There is access for candidates as well as election officials to gated communities. The processes of the electoral office also allow candidate access to malls or privately owned public spaces where often candidates are not allowed to communicate with the public. A former chief electoral officer made it very clear that there will also be an opportunity for electoral officials to go to perhaps seniors houses and shelters, places where people may not be able to get to the polls. I would suggest that we as a committee and we as legislators be immensely vigilant going forward to ensure that marginalized groups are not left out.

We on this side of the House had real concerns with the electoral officials and other witnesses who came before us. We implored the Chief Electoral Officer to be more vigilant and more targeted in areas of low enumeration or voter turnout. That office has taken on that responsibility.

We also asked that in areas, whether it is an intercity or a remote community, an aboriginal community or otherwise, where people in the past have shown an inability to exercise their franchise, that more vigilant and more targeted enumeration takes place.

With the special concern that has been raised with respect to aboriginal communities, remote communities in particular, we put to the Chief Electoral Officer that an acceptable form of government picture identification could be an aboriginal status card, if it had an address on it. If the address is not on it, then there could be a letter from the band office or something else indicating the address of the person together with the card in order to satisfy the requirements.

*Government Orders*

While we must be extremely vigilant that marginalized groups are not left out of the process, we must also be vigilant and ensure that there is no opportunity for voter fraud, not by those people, but by others who may for unscrupulous reasons, and with many more resources, try to defeat the process and the fairness of the process.

It is the fairness of the process and the belief that Canadians have that it is a fair and honest system that is really one of the major concerns in this country. I would suggest that nothing will cause voter participation to decline faster than if the general public loses its faith in the fairness of the process.

That may sound far-fetched, but we all know what happened in 2000 in Florida with the U.S. presidential election and how flawed that process was even though it was presenting a very elaborate electoral system.

●(1610)

We do need to be vigilant going forward to ensure people are not left out but we also need to take this as a first step in a much broader electoral reform process. In the spring of 2004, the Law Commission of Canada published a paper. It is an independent commission which, I would remind the government, that it has just starved of all of its budget from its actions last fall. However, the Law Commission came up with a paper on electoral reform that is probably based on greater consultation and greater research than any other electoral reform suggestion in the Commonwealth and there was an obligation on our previous government and on the current government for the Minister of Justice to answer that Law Commission report.

The process had begun. Electoral reform, with the agreement of the NDP, was put in the Speech from the Throne of the previous Liberal government. A committee had plans to look into electoral reform but that, for some reason, has now been stopped. I would put it to all members of the House and certainly to the government and the Minister of Justice that there is a responsibility to take up that public review.

I heard last week that the government will be hiring a polling company and a think tank to consult in a few communities across the country. I would ask the Prime Minister and the Attorney General of Canada whether they have ever read that Law Commission report and, if they have, why they think they need an alternative process at this stage and start all over again.

We should have Parliament and the House of Commons in a special committee looking at real electoral reform and then we need a proper response from the government to the Law Commission's report. If we are to have a citizen's assembly, which we had in British Columbia and which is being advanced in Ontario, we need to ensure that the objective is to have an open and comprehensive process and not some slapdash polling process.

**Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would appreciate hearing what the member for Vancouver Quadra has to say when he says that the most important principle and the most important issue is to have fairness in our electoral system. I would certainly agree with that.

However, I am quite surprised and somewhat disappointed that the member did not support amendments in committee to ensure the bill

would be fair to the most vulnerable in our society and the people who have the most difficulty in terms of having ID. I really do not understand why he and his party are not supporting amendments that would make it clear that there are fair provisions to ensure that disenfranchised people will be able to vote.

The bill, without these amendments and without the changes we tried to make at committee, will lead to a consequence that many people will not be able to vote. I appreciate the member's comments about a citizen's assembly and bigger democratic electoral reform. This party has always put forward and championed the idea of proportional representation which, unfortunately, the Liberals decided to do nothing about.

However, here we have something very specific. We are talking about individual voter's rights. I would like the member to address why he did not support these amendments to at least ensure that people, for example in the downtown east side, would be able to vote without having to go through an incredible process that I do not think will work in terms of having only one person vouching for a person.

●(1615)

**Hon. Stephen Owen:** Mr. Speaker, this is a matter of balance. If we are to have an electoral system with integrity, it needs to have sufficient rigour to give confidence to the general public that fraud cannot be perpetrated.

Having worked in the downtown Vancouver east side as a legal aid lawyer, I know the problems well and I know the despair in which many people live. I think we need to be vigilant, and I know the member for Vancouver East will be, in ensuring that electoral officials do more targeted enumeration in shelters, in single room occupancy hotels and in areas where people, who might otherwise not be able to avail themselves of being registered, get registered. We also need to have special provisions to go into shelters at election time to perhaps make the voting process taken to people in an easier way.

However, the concerns that were raised about sequential and multiple vouching I take as a warning for us to be more vigilant. If that proves to be true, we need to continue being careful that it does not exclude people, but if we find it does, then this is a work in progress and—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer):** Questions and comments. The hon. member for Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington.

**Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, my question is on the very same line of thought that the hon. member for Vancouver Quadra was developing.

The member and I were both in the committee when a provision was put into the proposed text of the bill. It was an attempt to deal with the construction of the voters list and the way in which people get left off the voters list. The provision recognized that homeless people actually do have a roof over their heads at certain times when they are at a homeless shelter and that people at homeless shelters are capable of vouching for other individuals. I specifically asked the Chief Electoral Officer for information that would allow us to go and put this provision into the bill.



*Government Orders*

I want to read this for the member for Vancouver Quadra and ask him if he thinks this deals with the kind of issue he was talking about.

It says that the following people can vouch for a person to get him or her onto the list:

—the elector, or another elector who lives at the same residence as the elector, at their residence and in the presence of the revising agents completes the prescribed registration form and takes the prescribed oath.

Does the member believe that this largely deals with the problem of homeless people not getting on the list that the member for Vancouver East was raising?

**Hon. Stephen Owen:** Mr. Speaker, that was part of our discussion in the committee. I think we will need to be very careful to ensure that people who want to vote are not left out and we need to ensure this sort of process works. It is certainly what we had in mind when we were given assurances by the Chief Electoral Officer that electoral officials could actually go into shelters to seek that kind of vouching.

● (1620)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to discuss Bill C-31 at the report stage.

Before stating our position on the motions in amendment, I would like to provide an overview of Bill C-31 and the work that has been done.

The purpose of this bill is to improve the integrity of the electoral process by reducing the opportunity for fraud or error. As a member of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, I participated in the work leading up to the introduction of this bill in the House of Commons, so I can say that a lot of work went into it.

The committee includes representatives of each political party, all of whom cooperated effectively, thus enabling us to achieve our goal of improving the electoral process and strengthening the public's faith in it.

This bill will reduce the opportunity for fraud or error and will improve the accuracy of the list of electors. It will also make it easier for people to exercise their right to vote and will improve communication among election officials, candidates, political parties and voters.

I would suggest that the Conservative government approach other files with the same attitude and the same level of respect for other parties' ideas. The Conservatives' ideological agenda did not dominate our work, which probably explains why we were able to cooperate so well.

I would like to discuss in detail some of the provisions designed to reduce the opportunity for electoral fraud and error.

Electors must now present government-issued photo identification showing their name and address. In Quebec, a driver's licence is an excellent example of acceptable identification.

An elector who cannot produce such identification must present two pieces of identification authorized by the Chief Electoral Officer showing both name and address.

Potential electors who cannot produce two acceptable pieces of identification may swear under oath that they are who they say they are. They must also be vouched for by another qualified elector.

The bill also provides that in case of reasonable doubt concerning whether a person qualifies as an elector—for example, if the person's age or citizenship are in doubt—that person must sign an affidavit. Only citizens over age 18 qualify to vote; currently, no proof of age is required, not even if there is reasonable doubt that the person qualifies.

We think that such a simple and clearly defined procedure will improve the electoral process by preventing more fraud.

The elector's date of birth will be added to the list of electors. This will help better identify the person wishing to exercise their right to vote.

In Quebec, the lists of electors include date of birth. This system works and fosters the objectives we want to achieve with this bill.

The bill also limits vouching so that an elector may vouch for only one person. This measure will help prevent a practice referred to as “serial vouching”, which could result in fraud.

What is serial vouching? Serial vouching is when an individual who was not originally registered to vote is vouched for by someone—whose name is on the list of electors—in order to be added to the voters' list, and then vouches for someone else who was not registered, and so on.

The bill also contains another change that the Bloc Québécois has been calling for for a very long time and that is assigning a unique identification number to every elector. This unique identifier will be included on the list of electors and will improve the quality of the lists by ensuring that duplications are eliminated.

● (1625)

It is important to point out that this unique identifier will be randomly generated and assigned by the Chief Electoral Officer.

Bill C-31 also proposes measures to facilitate the right to vote. The time limit within which an elector with physical limitations can request a transfer certificate to vote at a polling station with level access has been removed. There will no longer be a deadline for disabled electors to apply for a transfer. I want to emphasize that this amendment does not give licence to avoid making polling stations accessible.

Bill C-31 permits an advance polling station to serve a single polling division rather than two or more polling divisions, in order to improve accessibility to advance polling stations for voters, particularly in remote regions.

It can be difficult for voters in these regions to get to advance polling stations. Year after year, a growing number of people choose to go to an advance poll to exercise their right to vote. It is therefore necessary to enhance accessibility.

*Government Orders*

The bill also seeks to improve communications between election officials, candidates, political parties and voters. It gives candidates a right of access to common areas of public places for election campaign purposes.

It is important to be able to meet people where they are. An election campaign is a unique opportunity to call attention to ideas and to talk about our record as members of Parliament. We must promote this, while also respecting the public.

Bill C-31 also improves access for parties and candidates to up-to-date lists of electors, which they can use to communicate with voters and encourage them to vote. In order to do so, it is important that they have access to accurate and up-to-date lists.

Various motions were presented to amend this bill. The Bloc Québécois reviewed all them and has taken a stand.

The Bloc Québécois opposes Motion No. 1, because it would imply not indicating the date of birth on voters lists, thus reducing the chances of properly identifying a potential voter.

The Bloc Québécois is also opposed to Motion No. 2, because it increases the risks of electoral fraud by opposing the simple and clearly established procedure of identifying potential voters by requiring appropriate pieces of identification and having them take an oath.

In conclusion, I want to mention the successful cooperation that led to this bill. I hope the Conservative government will follow this example in the future.

The Bloc Québécois supports this legislation. However, we oppose the motions presented at report stage.

My Bloc Québécois colleagues and I are proud to have proposed some elements of the Quebec electoral system to help the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs in its work. The Quebec electoral system has proven its effectiveness. The elements found in Bill C-31 that are patterned on the Quebec model will help improve the federal electoral system.

The objective of this bill is to improve the integrity of the electoral process. I believe that, in this sense, the bill is a step in the right direction.

• (1630)

[English]

**Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have been told that the Bloc has a lot of concerns about voter fraud in Quebec, so the Bloc members may have reasons for supporting this bill, but it almost seems that there is a theoretical debate going on and that the real application and implications of this bill are not being felt or heard by members.

I want to ask the member why she would not be concerned about the reality. I think it has been very clearly documented that if this bill goes through as is, there are people who will lose the right to vote. They are not people who are involved in fraud. They are people who for one reason or another do not have ID. The vouching system that she and her party are now supporting will be impossible to engineer. I can tell her the reality is that people will be disenfranchised and not allowed to vote.

If the Bloc is very concerned about voter fraud in Quebec, then why would the Bloc members not come forward with a simple idea such as the one the member for Ottawa Centre made? Voter cards should be put in envelopes instead of being mailed and sent to buildings where they can be picked up. The most simple thing to do would be to put them in envelopes and put the voter's name on the front. That would probably eliminate potential fraud more than anything else.

I am really mystified as to why the Bloc is supporting this bill and not recognizing the real impact it is going to have on individual voters who often do not get heard. These are people who usually do not have a voice, so when they vote it is really important.

I am very disappointed that the Bloc is ignoring people who are marginalized and is basically creating a system that will make it impossible for those people to vote. How does the member explain that?

[Translation]

**Ms. Pauline Picard:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from the NDP for her comments. I will answer her questions.

The NDP claims that disclosing the date of birth of voters infringes on privacy rights. We in the Bloc Québécois regard the date of birth as an important tool allowing political parties to control the identity of voters who want to exercise their franchise, especially if a would-be voter shows up at a polling station without the required ID. With respect to the NDP's concerns about privacy, the Bloc Québécois suggests that, in Quebec, political parties have access to such information, and democracy in Quebec is no worse off. Consequently, the Bloc Québécois opposes Motion No. 2. The NDP thinks that this provision might restrict the ability to vote of those who do not have ID or forgot their ID at home on voting day. The Bloc Québécois thinks that it is necessary, in order to prevent fraud, that ID be required. Sufficient amendments have been made to the bill to enable sensitive groups such as aboriginal people to exercise their franchise. Note that a homeless person who does not have ID could still vote provided a qualified elector was able to vouch for them. Earlier, the parliamentary secretary described to our colleague from the NDP what was added to the Canada Elections Act for those who may not be able to get ID.

Regarding Motion No. 4, clause 22 provides that, in the event that a name is crossed off in error from the list of electors, the elector in question may vote, provided that the elector takes an oath and that the returning officer verifies that there was indeed an error made. Bill C-31 added to these two requirements the need for electors to identify themselves with ID. The NDP amendment proposes to remove the latter requirement. The Bloc Québécois thinks that it is necessary, in order to prevent fraud, that ID be required.

*Government Orders*

•(1635)

[English]

**Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to the bill. It is a very important bill and unfortunately it has not had a lot of attention. If the bill goes through unchanged, it will have a substantial impact on the voting rights of many low income people in Canada, and certainly in my own riding of Vancouver East, which includes the downtown east side.

I would like to begin by laying out the alleged problem we are dealing with. We are told that there is voter fraud and therefore these very significant changes need to be made to the Canada Elections Act to prevent fraud. Yet at committee when the debate first started, I actually asked the Chief Electoral Officer if he felt that there were huge instances of fraud. He basically said that there were a few isolated incidents, but no political party had brought to his attention any systemic things going on, and as far as he was concerned it was not a big issue. I was very curious about that because that was the Chief Electoral Officer who was speaking.

It has been very mystifying and in fact disappointing, as I said earlier, to know that three parties, the Conservatives, the Liberals and the Bloc, are in bed together here to change the Canada Elections Act to deal with an alleged problem. It is like applying a sledgehammer to a fly. The consequences of the bill will have a disastrous impact.

We have heard the parties that are supporting the bill claim that they have put provisions in the bill to ensure that homeless people vote and that there can still be a vouching for somebody. However, if we actually look at what the bill contains, we see that it creates a myriad of bureaucratic procedures which I can guarantee will result in many, many people being disenfranchised.

As it is now, if a person is homeless, on the street, if he or she does not have ID, the person can get a statutory declaration from a lawyer. There can be someone in the community who vouches for people, someone who really does know all kinds of individuals because that person may work at a place like the Carnegie Centre in my riding and can say, "Yes, I know who that person is. Yes, they are who they say they are". The individual gets the statutory declaration and that individual can vote.

The way it will work now is that somebody can only vouch for one person if they are in the same poll and if that person is on the voters list. It will be like two needles trying to find each other in a haystack. It will create absolute chaos.

I am deeply concerned that the bill is going through with so little attention, other than from the NDP. I want to thank the member for Ottawa Centre who did an incredible job on the committee of pointing out every single clause that was a failure and was basically denying people's rights. Other than the NDP and some of the witnesses who came forward to point out the problems, the bill will apparently sail through.

I want to give one example. In the 2000 election I felt very honoured to accompany Sereena Abotsway to the poll. She voted under the statutory declaration. It was the first time she had ever voted and she voted with a sense of hope. She was becoming more

aware of the political system. Because we had a system in place of lawyers who were there to assist, she felt she had the confidence, the reason and the hope to vote. This young woman unfortunately is one of the six murdered women who are now part of the missing women trial that is taking place in Vancouver. It just wrenches my gut to know that there are so many people out there who are so marginalized and disenfranchised by the system that we create on the basis that we are making it all neat and tidy and that it is all about dealing with fraud.

We hear theoretically from the Liberals, the member for Vancouver Quadra who said, "Oh, yes, I believe in fairness. It is about fairness". The way the system will work will be incredibly unfair. Even in the memory of Sereena Abotsway, to think about her and what happened to her and what happens to other people, I feel terrible that the bill will go through and that people will lose the right to vote.

I am very proud of the fact that the NDP caucus is standing up against the bill and saying that the bill is really quite awful and will deny people the right to vote.

•(1640)

I want to thank some of the lawyers who came forward at the committee and appeared on video conference: Jim Quail, executive director for the B.C. Public Interest Advocacy Centre; Tina-Marie Bradford, a lawyer with the B.C. Government and Service Employees' Union; and Murray Mollard, executive director of the B.C. Civil Liberties Association.

They are knowledgeable people who came forward and told the committee in detail what the system is like now, what works, what does not, and what the impact of these changes will be. They were basically ignored, other than by our member on the committee, the member for Ottawa Centre, who valiantly put forward amendments to try to mitigate the damage in the bill.

These are the lawyers who actually know what this system is about. They are not dealing with it at a theoretical level. They are dealing with it on the ground. Their advice and expertise were basically ignored and turned down. I feel that this is very unfortunate.

I heard the government House leader say that he is in favour of having a system that is as open as possible to maintain the franchise. I heard him say that the Chief Electoral Officer has said that there will be more aggressive enumeration. None of those things are actually going to assist in terms of what takes place in ensuring that a statutory declaration on its own is available and that there can be a proper vouching system to allow it to work.

I feel that the claims being made by the government in pretending that the bill will ensure that people who are at risk still have the right to vote are completely false. Even to say that there will be enumeration in homeless shelters and that the government will make sure it happens, it sounds good on paper, but we know that most people who are in homeless shelters have to leave during the day.

That is the way these places work. In many places, one part of the rules is that the homeless have to leave early in the morning and not go back until late at night, so exactly where are the enumerators going to find people in homeless shelters?

*Government Orders*

I feel that the rationale being given by the government House leader on this bill is very superficial. Again, the government should have paid attention to the people who really know how the system works in the local community and at each individual poll and polling district and what it is that the bill would do.

I believe that if we were truly addressing the inconsistencies and problems in our electoral system we would be calling for universal enumeration. Again, this is something that was ignored by the government. It is being ignored by the other political parties.

I do not know about other members, but I remember the day when we could go down the street and actually see the voters list on the telephone poles. We could see whether or not we were on the voters list. We actually had an enumerator who went door to door and asked if people in the enumerated household were eligible to vote.

It was a system that worked, but now we have the high tech, centralized system. There is absolutely no question about it, because the evidence is there: as a result of that new system, many people have been left on the margins and their ability to access the system and to get on the voters list has been seriously undermined. That is a reality of what has taken place over the last decade.

Now the government adds insult to injury by taking away the one provision that was left to ensure that someone who was in a very vulnerable situation and did not have the right ID could at least still get to the poll. That would now be taken away with the bill if these particular amendments are not supported.

In closing, I do not think that this is a good day for the House of Commons. We are meant to be here to represent the public interest. The right to vote of all people, whether wealthy or poor, homeless or living in a fancy house, is being seriously undermined by the bill, so it will be a very bad day in the House of Commons if the bill goes through.

**Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the complaints that the member for Vancouver East has been raising tend to revolve around the issue of homeless people and their ability to participate and the danger that they will be left off the voters list and will not be able to cast their ballots. They are valid things to be concerned about. I think it is not valid to say, as she is saying, that these things have not been taken into account in the bill, in the work the committee did on the bill, in the questions we asked the Chief Electoral Officer, in the responses he gave us, and in the way we incorporated his responses in the amendments to the bill.

I will point this out again and ask her why she thinks this does not work. The law is now amended. I invite the member to look at subclause 16(1) of the bill, which states that an elector or any other elector living at the residence of that particular person, for example, at a homeless shelter, can vouch for the person and get him or her on the voters roll. Not only that, but they can be vouched for at the poll. They cannot vouch for many people, but it does not mean that many people cannot vouch for other people on that list.

The member says that people have to go to the homeless shelter during the day. That is a good point, but we have a number of ways of dealing with it. They could be enumerated when they are back at the shelter by adjusting the enumerator's hours. Enumerators

frequently work in the evening for this reason anyway, so it would be easy to accomplish this goal. It could be dealt with by other means. There is a wide variety of ways this could be dealt with.

What I cannot understand is why she thinks that with this provision—and this provision was put in specifically after the Chief Electoral Officer was asked how to deal with this kind of problem—this seriously fails to achieve the goals that she is outlining.

• (1645)

**Ms. Libby Davies:** Mr. Speaker, I know that it fails to achieve the goal of allowing people in that situation to vote because of the evidence and testimony that was heard at the committee. The member also heard it. I think knows very clearly that the system his government has devised for this bill will create complexities in saying that only one person who is in the same poll and already on the list can vouch for only one person. It is going to create a bureaucratic quagmire of trying to get all kinds of individuals to vouch for only one person. It will be almost impossible to do.

If we look at it on paper, maybe it makes sense to the member. Maybe he thinks it will work, but I can tell him that lawyers who have been involved in this system, particularly in using statutory declarations, have told us that it will be a nightmare and that it will basically disenfranchise people.

The people we are talking about are not committing fraud. That is what is so terrible about this bill. It is aiming at the people who are not committing fraud whatsoever, but their right is being removed.

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I commend the member for her tireless devotion to the people who have been disenfranchised and I would like to ask her a question.

In light of this whole focus that this is somehow part of electoral reform, when we have seen no movement in the House on serious matters of electoral reform in terms of establishing a proper proportional representation system, and given the abysmal record of voting in our country, the alienation that people feel in this country toward voting and the cynicism they have toward the House, does she think that perhaps our electoral reform representative from the government party might have put his efforts into something a little more substantive that would have actually shown some more results and that would have enfranchised a lot more people who right now just turn off their televisions every time they hear a politician speak?

**Ms. Libby Davies:** Mr. Speaker, the member for Timmins—James Bay is right on. We are spending all of this time on this bill that will affect people in a negative way and we are completely missing the bigger picture in terms of the real democratic reform that needs to take place in this country and which the NDP has championed for a very long time in terms of ensuring that there is electoral reform through proportional representation, for example, so that people's votes really do count.

*Government Orders*

I talk to voters who usually do not vote and are cynical and turned off. When some of them do vote, I feel really proud. It does not matter to me who they vote for. I just feel proud that they took the time to vote. It really means something when one sees the kind of cynicism that exists. This bill is going to undermine and limit the availability and capacity of those people to vote while completely ignoring the larger question of democratic electoral reform.

[*Translation*]

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer):** It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the question to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment is as follows: the hon. member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, The Forestry Industry.

[*English*]

**Hon. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak in the House today on Bill C-31, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act and the Public Service Employment Act.

On June 22, 2006, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs tabled a report in the House that was entitled "Improving the Integrity of the Electoral Process: Recommendations for Legislative Change". The report was based in part on the recommendations from the Chief Electoral Officer.

While it has already been referenced and there continue to be ongoing discussions and debate about fundamental changes to our electoral system, these should not detract from the efforts that should be made to improve the existing system.

This enactment amends the Canada Elections Act to improve the integrity of the electoral process by reducing the opportunity for electoral fraud or for error. It requires that electors, before voting, provide one piece of government issued photo identification that shows their name and address, or two pieces of identification, authorized by the Chief Electoral Officer, which show their name and address. Or they can take an oath, or be vouched for by another elector.

It also amends the Canada Elections Act to, among other things, make operational changes to improve the accuracy of the national registry of electors. It facilitates voting and enhances communications with the electorate. It goes on to amend the Public Service Employment Act to permit the Public Service Commission to make regulations to extend the maximum term of employment of casual workers. This works both for the system and for the individual workers.

All of us in this House have gone through the electoral system at least once. Many of us have gone through it several times. On election day, we put our faith in the hands of our electorate. However, collectively as Canadians, voters and candidates, we also depend on the integrity of the electoral system to reduce the opportunity for electoral fraud and to ensure secure, fair and accessible voting on voting day. It is my hope that the initiatives contained in this legislation will enhance this process for Canadians.

A key concern for the Liberal committee members is ensuring that the bill allows for aboriginal status identification to be acceptable as proof for voting purposes. Government officials have clarified that

the text of the bill requires either, number one, government issued photo ID with an address, or number two, government issued photo ID without an address, including band status cards, accompanied by a letter from the band council or by a phone or utility bill that shows the resident's name and actual address.

A second concern for the Liberal committee members is ensuring that the enumeration process is strengthened in reserve communities. The government has suggested that, rather than send the bill to committee, the committee simply pass a motion calling on the Chief Electoral Officer to strengthen enumeration in reserve communities and in other areas of low enumeration.

It is difficult to strike the balance that ensures the integrity of the system without becoming overly onerous on the citizen and denying him or her the right to vote. It is a privilege to cast a ballot. I appreciate the fact that voters do not have acceptable ID. I also know that all of us in this House can dedicate ourselves entirely to the activity of election day. As a matter of fact, many of us spend every waking moment and several weeks campaigning.

However, the vast majority of Canadian voters have busy lives that involve hectic, challenging schedules. Even though voter turnout improved in the 2006 federal election, it continues to be alarmingly low. It is important that Canadians can go to their local polling station knowing what information is expected of them in being able to exercise their democratic right. It is our expectation that a uniform procedure for voter identification at the polls will provide clear and consistent information and a system that reinforces the importance of exercising one's right to vote.

We on this side of the House also support the strengthening of the enumeration process, particularly, again, in reserve communities and in other areas of low enumeration.

● (1650)

Further, parts of the proposed legislation also address accessibility issues as some voters with disabilities will no longer required to request a transfer to a polling station with level access three days in advance. As well, the proposed legislation opens up accessibility to advanced polls. These are positive improvements for people with mobility limitations.

On this side of the House, we support the changes to the Canada Elections Act that protect against the likelihood of voter fraud and misrepresentation. We need to ensure that aboriginal photo identification is an acceptable form of voter identification. It is our understanding that Bill C-31, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act and the Public Service Employment Act, makes the operational improvements that are necessary and will advance the integrity of our voting system.

*Government Orders*

•(1655)

**Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge and thank the hon. member for Kitchener Centre who worked very hard on committee. She had some great input and many of her suggestions actually wound up in the bill. The hon. member for the NDP spoke about a number of witnesses, and the member was at committee when they spoke.

I want to pose a question and make a comment or two.

One of the witnesses described the issue of statutory declaration and the process whereby tables would be set up in various areas and people would declare who they were. I am sure the member will recall one a question that was posed to a witness about how someone would know the individual was exactly who he or she said. The response was that sometimes they asked them to check their pockets. Sometimes parking stubs or perhaps prescription bottles were found in their pockets. This would help firm up who they were.

One of the witnesses prior to that suggested these folks were often robbed, which is a terrible thing, but ultimately suggested that whatever was in their pockets was not there very long. The question was posed that if this was the case, then the first thing that would get stolen would be prescriptions. The statutory declaration issue became a little less reliable, given the way these folks were identified was in itself completely unreliable.

The member understood this issue very well and she made some great comments at committee. Could she perhaps confirm that although statutory declarations have a role, they certainly have a lot of holes in them?

**Hon. Karen Redman:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his kind comments and for his insight in how we grappled with this. Every member on committee really grappled with the kind of balance that we needed to have.

My recollection is very similar to that of the member for Cambridge as we talked about the identification of the population, which the NDP has very eloquently defended. I do not believe there is any intention to disenfranchise any voter who wants to vote in an election.

There are out of the cold programs in my own riding of Kitchener Centre. There are homeless shelters. The people who work at these establishments know their clientele very well. One of the things that I found most shocking, when we were in government, was how we addressed homelessness. A great number of homeless people actually go out to work every day. They may have underemployment issues. They may have minimum employment. They are known people who are carrying on with their lives but do not have money for shelter. These kinds of people will be known at the House of Friendship. They will be known at the out of the cold programs that are run by churches like St. Andrew's in downtown Kitchener. Individuals will be able to vouch for these people.

We have to be very cognizant of keeping that proper balance, but I would agree that these are positive changes. We do not support the amendments that the NDP has brought forward. We feel they take out a very important aspect of the improvement.

**Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, my colleague was on the committee, and I want to pose a question about

the issue of birth dates. It is not something she brought up in her comments, so I would like to have her take on it.

In committee I had deep concerns about the fact that not only would the government have access to this private information, which it does from time to time, but political parties would have access to it as well. The Bloc put this forward as a motion and the Liberals supported it. Now the government is supporting it too, under the auspices of goodwill.

I do not understand the need for parliamentarians to have that private information. We have seen recently the concerns consumers have about private information being out there. There will be 308 ridings, with goodness knows how many political parties, all having the birth date information of all electors. We already have problems with our system mixing things up. We just need to ask people who thought they were Canadian citizens.

What is the rationale for this and why would my colleague support such an amendment?

•(1700)

**Hon. Karen Redman:** Mr. Speaker, I share my colleague's concerns. I do however take very seriously the kind of testimony that we heard from colleagues from Quebec where that is just a matter of public record. They have not seen any problem with it. It is a matter of public information. They are published.

I think it facilitates with scrutineering at polls. Again, it is something we will monitor to see if there are abuses. I know the member is not casting any aspersions on anyone who would be employed by Elections Canada because we have people who do amazing work to ensure we have a system that is envied around the world.

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-31. There are a number of concerns that we face on the front lines in my riding to which I would like to speak.

At the outset, I find it very interesting that in terms of electoral reform issues, this is the one issue that has been brought before the House. We are talking about the threat of fraud, yet we see very little evidence of actual fraud having occurred.

In 2006 there was one case of fraud in the entire country. In 2004 there were zero cases. In 2000 there were three cases. That is four out of the millions of people who voted in elections in the country. Yet we have a need for all parliamentarians to stand up and deal with this threat.

I raise the question that perhaps it is guilty minds. We have only to look at the leadership races of parties in the House, where questions of conduct have been much more egregious than what we see in people who try to exercise their democratic franchise. Certainly no one would suggest average citizens would be out patting down cadavers to see if they had party memberships to vote for the leadership, as happened to some very august members of the House. What are we thinking to impose on the honest law-abiding citizens of our country?

*Government Orders*

I suggest the bigger issue is disenfranchisement and cynicism about the electoral process. We need to be looking at that. There are number of problems that have to be addressed. I would have expected that they would have been addressed in a bill brought forward by the new government.

For example, on the need for electoral reform, people have been calling out for it. People are tuning out of the electoral process. They are tired of our old system and they feel that more voices have to be heard. Yet the two main parties certainly have no real interest in seeing this go forward, so this is not coming forward as a priority.

The other question is on how the actual electoral voting system works now that we do not have a proper voting list.

In the 2004 election people in my riding who went to vote were told that they were on a voter's list 40 kilometres away. I know people in the southern end of my riding were told they did not belong in their own riding because their mailbox was in the municipality. Elections Canada had actually run a line through the bottom of my riding so people who lived in my riding were told they had to vote in another riding.

These are problems. People get fed up when they try to vote. They go home and they say they are not going to vote. That is a serious threat to democracy. I would have thought that issue would have been brought forward with some sense of urgency, but no.

What we are dealing with is the potential that somewhere down the road Canadians are going to commit fraud in voting. Why would anyone go out of their way to defraud just to try to vote, when we are begging and encouraging people to come out? However, that is a larger philosophical question.

I would like to focus on a few areas that are very important in my region. I have very large isolated first nation communities. When we talk about getting a photo ID card, that makes sense, if we believe that every Canadian has a right to a photo ID card. However, on the James Bay coast up to 30% of our population is not eligible for health care status because the province of Ontario does not bother to go and deal with the Cree communities. It has fallen to my office and my provincial counterpart, Gilles Bisson. We go there and fill out these cards.

The interesting thing about this is how do they get a photograph on the ID when the provincial government is leaving it up to a federal member of Parliament and a provincial member of the legislature to fill out the forms for citizens? Guess what. The Ontario government has a special loophole. It does not bother giving a photograph, if one lives on the James Bay coast. It will simply fill out the form and send it there with a trillium logo.

It is amazing. I have thousands of wonderful looking Cree families and all their faces look like a trillium logo because the province of Ontario does not even both to ensure that these people have photo ID. This is something they are expected to have if they are going to be able to vote.

• (1705)

There is the issue of having an address. I invite anybody to go into Fort Albany and ask people their addresses. People do not have street addresses that they go by. We find that in all our communities.

We have many of our communities where they simply do not have even the most basic registration.

In fact, if we are talking about administering an oath, I would like to see electoral officers come up and do the oath in Cree or Ojicree. Many elders, for example, do not speak English. Many elders have not birth certificates, but we are trying to get them.

There is the issue of these community members being unfairly penalized because somebody somewhere might some day decide to defraud the system. I find it is an outrageous thought. Imagine people in Attawapiskat going to the poll and claiming to be someone different when everybody knows who they are. I think they would get run out of town fairly quickly.

Unless the members of Parliament think I am making light of these issues, I would like to quote some of the testimony that was brought before the committee from Nishnawbe-Aski Nation, which represents the 70 communities across the northern Treaty 9 area, an area I represent.

It stated:

We are also concerned that these amendments to the act could affect our elders. Most of these people do not have birth certificates; few of them have a driver's licence. Leaving their communities to acquire photo identification is a severe hardship and in some instances it will be neither feasible nor affordable.

—we suggest that the proposed amendments have failed to take into consideration the realities of the people in our remote communities. They are based on the assumption that the majority of Canadian electors live in urban centres. Until government services are made available in an equitable manner to our people living in remote communities and the amendments to the act reflect the realities of the lives of our people...I suggest that the committee, if possible, visit some of our communities to better understand the challenges we face in our role as Canadian citizens.

This is the message I hear from the leadership in Nishnawbe-Aski Nation and the Mishkeegogamang tribal areas, and it is a message I want to bring to Parliament. Our people on the James Bay coast are not committing fraud. The biggest issue we have is encouraging them to see themselves as participants in the electoral system. That has been a hard sell. We need to ensure that more and more Canadians are entitled and encouraged to vote and are made to feel that voting is something worthwhile.

I will go back to the original point that I started to make.

We have put this forward as the only bill so far of electoral reform in this Parliament, and it is to deal with fraud. We have had almost zero cases of fraud in the electoral system. Yet we know this bill would disenfranchise hundreds, if not thousands, across Canada. For the one person convicted of fraud in 2006, for the zero persons in 2004, for the three convicted in 2000, what we are setting out to do is to go after many people on the margins who right now we should be trying to encourage to vote.

I will conclude with this whole question of allowing political parties access to birth dates. Some people might say this is a minor issue, it is a way of ensuring fairness. I do not impugn any political parties here or any political regions in the country, but I suggest that is in there for the crassest political opportunism. The idea of outreach in certain parties is to get people's birth date and then phone them on their birthday and say, "Hi, it's Bob, your MP, phoning you on your birthday", and that is supposed to suffice.

*Government Orders*

In fact, I first heard about this trick from a MLA from Quebec who said, “You know, this is the one thing I do all year, I make sure I phone everybody on their birthday, and they love it. And you know what? I don’t have to do much else”.

What we are saying is, in the interest of going after the fraudsters, we have to ensure that every political party can ensure that they can phone constituents on their birthdays just to secure their vote. That is the reason we are talking about this today.

Let us be honest. I know it is a sin as a politician, and I have to admit it, to give away trade secrets to the general public so they know how politicians really act. However, I feel incumbent at this moment to stand up and speak. The reason we want their birth date information is so we can hit them up on their birthday and secure a vote. I think that is fairly cynical, just as I feel a lot about this bill.

● (1710)

I would encourage the members to consider the bigger issue, which is that we need to find ways for people to have confidence in the democratic system and to feel as if they can become involved. I am concerned that what we are going after is a chimera because we have not seen the evidence of fraud to back up the need for this. If there were large areas, I would consider it, but at this point I cannot see further disenfranchising the communities in my riding, such as Ogoki, Kashechewan, Attawapiskat, Peawanuck, Moosonee and Moose Factory. I cannot see people from those communities, who have already been marginalized enough, feeling that they need to do anything more than to show up and say that they are citizens of this country.

As it says in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, every citizen of Canada has the right to vote in an election of members of the House of Commons or a legislative assembly and to be qualified for membership therein, end of story. There are no qualifications. It does not say anything about bringing ID. It does not say anything about people having to give out their birth date information. They have that right.

**Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to deal with the item the member mentioned in this intervention and in previous interventions when he stood in questions and comments and suggested that there was no electoral fraud in Canada. The Chief Electoral Officer presented himself to the committee and that was not what he said.

Initially he said, “We will prosecute and we are prosecuting electoral fraud vigorously”. I asked him to tell us how much had actually been done and to send the committee the information. Having been the Chief Electoral Officer for five elections, I asked him how many prosecutions there had been. His answer was that there had been less than one prosecution per election.

I do not think the member is actually suggesting that less than one case of actual fraud occurs in the entire country over the course of more than one election. A more plausible scenario is that basically the way the law is written it is impossible to prosecute electoral fraud. The problem is that it is impossible to hunt down the multiple voting that occurs because there is no record left behind. This is an attempt to deal with that problem.

I want to give an idea of how bad the problem is. In the riding of Trinity—Spadina in the last election we were told that thousands of people turned up on election day who did not have any record of their existence on the voters rolls but were allowed to vote because the choice came down to either allowing them to vote en masse or basically freezing out large numbers.

One man, James DiFiori, said that he voted three times, once for the Liberals, once for the Conservatives and once for the New Democrats. He is the only person being prosecuted by the Chief Electoral Officer after the last election because he was the only one for whom they had any hard evidence whatsoever.

This is an attempt to deal with the fact that there is no evidence by creating a paper trail, by creating ways to allow people to vote legally and preventing others from voting multiple times or illegally when they are not eligible. I wonder if there is a response from the member to this particular problem.

● (1715)

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** Mr. Speaker, I do not want to make light of the matter but the fact that one person was caught because he voted for the Tories, the Liberals and the New Democrats in the same poll does not to me constitute proof that there are thousands of people running around the streets trying to vote from poll to poll. We do not have the evidence. We need convictions.

I do not think the law is lax. The bigger issue, which goes back to my original point, is that we know that people are disenfranchised from their ability to vote. What are we doing to ensure that more people are brought into the electoral system and made to feel that they can vote? That is the number one issue.

If we are talking about the major issue that we need to deal with in terms of electoral reform in this Parliament, then going after Joe with three personalities in Trinity—Spadina or wherever he was, I do not think is the priority.

**Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I understand some of the sensitivities about a date of birth. I am pretty sure all members would agree that should there be any question of someone identifying their date of birth might give them the information they need to do it.

The argument that there has only been one or two frauds, et cetera, does not necessarily reflect how much fraud there is. If we do not have the tools to detect fraud, how will we know unless we provide more tools?

I think we have done too much work over the years to raise the level of respectability of this profession. For the member to suggest that if we give the list to the political parties, all MPs will use it to phone people to wish them a happy birthday, is absolutely ludicrous. Our ridings have 100,000-plus people in them. The parties do have access to the list because that is part of the political process.

The issue here is that we need to pick our priorities. There are certain benefits in terms of providing the scrutiny process of electoral day by having that additional piece of information, even for the simple case where two persons have identical names, to make that identification proper.



*Government Orders*

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, the member is running at cross purposes here. If we are talking about electoral scrutiny, that is one issue, but that is not what is being debated right now.

What has been added to the bill, thanks to the interventions by some of the other parties, is that not only do we take the election scrutineering information, but we turn it over to political parties. I think that is crass and it is something that engenders cynicism. That is not what we should be looking at.

If we are looking for further information to ensure fair scrutiny, I would be more than open to talking about it, but I am certainly not very keen on the image that it gives out that we will be turning this information over to political parties so they can mine it for political partisan purposes by sending out the crass little birthday cards after the election. That is an extra abuse of the system.

It is incumbent upon us in the House to ensure that we go after abuse in the system because we certainly do not want people having the touch put on them, three and four years after they are dead, to support certain candidates and certain political parties because we do have an ethical standard—

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order, please. Resuming debate. The hon. member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca.

**Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak today to Bill C-31, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act and the Public Service Employment Act.

It is important at the outset to give accolades to Elections Canada and the men and women who serve in that institution. What is probably not well-known by many listeners today is that the people who work at Elections Canada are world-class individuals who do world-class work. The proof in the pudding is that they have been asked time and time again to lend their expertise to countries that are trying to get out of environments that were highly undemocratic and often fraught with individuals who grossly abused their power and often dictatorships. Canada, through Elections Canada, has given those countries the ability to move from a dictatorship to a democracy.

One individual who is more responsible for that happening than anyone else, someone who is one of the best and brightest, is the head of Elections Canada, Jean-Pierre Kingsley. He has led Elections Canada and, under his 16 year tenure, has moved it into an institution that is world-class.

Elections Canada has served in many areas. I remember during the time when South Africa was moving from its dark days of apartheid into a rainbow nation and a democracy, it was Canada that came to the forefront to help out the South Africans to do something that was utterly inspiring and quite remarkable in moving from a draconian system into one that is a democracy without bloodshed.

All of us remember those times so long ago when we saw lineups of people that would extend for kilometres, individuals who for the first time in their life were able to exercise that most remarkable of democratic rights, the right to vote. Canada played an extraordinary role in that, as did Elections Canada. In fact, Jean-Pierre Kingsley

and his team had a lot to do with it, as they did in the Ukraine, Democratic Republic of Congo, Aceh and so many others.

Unfortunately, the government has, ironically, squeezed Mr. Kingsley out of his position. No longer will Jean-Pierre Kingsley be Canada's Chief Electoral Officer and, in that, we all lose.

If we are to have electoral reform, what is one thing that we could do to dramatically improve the ability of individuals to exercise that mighty right to put their check mark against somebody's name they want to represent them? It is electronic voting. In this era of new Windows operating systems, in these powerful computers that we have today and powerful operating systems, does it make sense that we cannot use the technologies that we have today to enable Canadians to vote electronically? There is no reason whatsoever, without putting the appropriate checks and balances in place, that we cannot have electronic voting.

One can just imagine what we could do if that were an option for Canadians to vote in a federal election. One can just imagine what that would do in terms of being able to garner and allow a greater number of people to exercise this right that so many have gone before and given their lives to enable us to do.

It would be a remarkable thing and, in particular, for a couple of populations: first, populations that are isolated, aboriginal and non-aboriginal, as members have mentioned before; and, second, youth. We know that many youth are not getting their information and news from traditional media. They are getting it through other means, often through computers and through the Internet. Why not tap into that and enable people to vote electronically which would enable people to exercise their democratic right and strengthen the democratic pillars of our country. It would be a remarkable thing.

Perhaps what is more important than how we elect individuals is the ability of those who we choose to come to this mighty House to exercise their ability to represent their constituents. I am talking about democratic reform. The Conservative Party's roots were in the Reform Party, and I was a member of that party. In part we came to this House to democratize it. What happen to those ideals of that party long ago?

● (1720)

What happened to enabling all members of Parliament to innovate, to drive and implement ideas, to work with members across party lines, to work with the bureaucracy, to work with the best and brightest in our country to implement the solutions that Canadians need?

Our constituents have less patience for the shenanigans that take place in this House. They have much more interest in their elected officials doing their jobs and implementing solutions in the best interests of the public. All of us here are trying to do that.

Mr. Speaker, you sir, have been here much longer than many of us and have seen that the system has declined over time. Particularly over the last year there has been a precipitous decline.

*Government Orders*

The Prime Minister was a member of the Reform Party. He knows from where I came. His view is different from that party's. His view is the opposite of reforming Parliament. He is an acolyte of the Straussian view of the world and believes that a small group of people are destined to rule. This is a dangerous thing. We see it now where decisions are not being made among the Conservative caucus but decisions are being dictated to the caucus by the Prime Minister's Office. A tiny group of people in the Prime Minister's Office is making decisions for everybody. It has to be disheartening for members who can serve their constituents, their communities, this House, and our country well with their individual expertise. They are innovative and they have solutions to offer that can be implemented in the public interest. Why is that no happening?

The government is being utterly remiss in not offering solutions that we can work on. My colleague from Vancouver-Quadra is a world-class innovator. He knows how we can democratize and liberate Parliament. He knows how we can draw the best and brightest to the House in the interests of the public. The Prime Minister and his caucus could tap into the expertise and knowledge of individuals like my colleague from Vancouver-Quadra. There are others who can offer similar solutions.

Why can we not reform the committees of the House? Why can we not allow individuals on those committees to do a better job for their constituents? There is no reason that cannot happen.

One of the things the government could do with respect to the public service that would be innovative would be to abolish the mandatory age of retirement. The mandatory age of retirement was set when the lifespan of individuals was in the late fifties, not today's lifespan which is 79 years for a man and 81 years for a woman. That would be an innovative way to reform the public service act. That is not included in this bill but it ought to be.

On the issue of accountability which the government speaks about, one of the big lies is the government's Federal Accountability Act. It is one of the government's initiatives where it is pulling the wool over people's eyes. The Federal Accountability Act is causing gridlock in the public service. It will not enable the public service to do its job and liberate the innovation that resides in the outstanding men and women who serve in our public service. That is a shame. The public is not aware of this. The Federal Accountability Act works counter to the public interest.

It is important that—

• (1725)

**Mr. Gary Goodyear:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I have been listening to the debate all day and this is the first time a member has stood up and used House time to write his next householder. I wonder if the member could focus on the issue before the House so that other members who are putting in their time here could have a constructive debate. The member can write his householder tonight.

**The Deputy Speaker:** I am not sure that was a point of order. The hon. member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca.

**Hon. Keith Martin:** Mr. Speaker, for the member's information, my householder was written a few weeks ago. If he wants a copy, I would be happy to send him one.

The reality is that this particular bill is part of a larger pattern of behaviour on the part of the government. It tells the public one thing but does something entirely different.

For example, the government cut EnerGuide saying that it was a useless program and then resurrected it as something else but watered it down to a pale shadow of its former self. The government claims to be in favour of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The government gives parents \$1,200 for child care, but the reality is there is tax on that. The government is not telling the public. The government has also talked about the Pacific gateway strategy—

**The Deputy Speaker:** I am sorry to inform the hon. member that his time is over and had he been speaking to the bill, I might even have allowed him a little bit more time. Questions and comments.

**Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am not sure that I will get an answer to this question, but it is sincere. It is quite obvious that the member did not do his research on the bill but as I mentioned just a moment ago on a point of order, he has chosen to use his time to write some good quality work for the next edition of his householder.

Is the member aware of the all-party committee that studied the bill intensively and which invited experts from all over the country and indeed some from around the world? The committee had video conferences and we spoke about a number of the issues about which the member obviously has no clue.

Is the member aware that his own party supported this? It was not just the members opposite but rather the Liberal Party of Canada that supported it and brought forward a number of incidents of fraud.

Why is the member so unprepared for the debate and so poorly researched? Is the member not embarrassed to waste taxpayers' dollars while we all sit here trying to debate a different bill? This is planet Earth. Is he not embarrassed to behave like this in the House?

• (1730)

**Hon. Keith Martin:** Mr. Speaker, obviously the member's head was plunged down on his desk and he was not listening to what I was saying.

For the sake of clarity I would be very happy to provide the member with a constructive solution that he may wish to take back to his caucus on the issue of electoral reform.

All of us have been speaking about how we can involve more Canadians and increase voter participation. We are all concerned about that, as I am sure the member is, so let me suggest one thing that was at the beginning of my speech.

I would strongly urge the member to suggest that his caucus investigate the use of electronic voting for people who live in faraway remote areas and also, as members of my caucus and members of the NDP were mentioning, people who have been disenfranchised, people who feel that they do not have a voice. In particular, as I said in my speech, I think of the youth. The youth, as the member may or may not be aware, are not getting their information from the traditional media. They are getting their information by other means. I would strongly advise the member—

*Government Orders*

**The Deputy Speaker:** There are others rising to ask questions. The hon. member for Ottawa Centre.

**Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I want to see if the member believes in the amendment that we put forward to take away the propriety of privacy concerns that we have, that is, the birth date information. The amendment put forward by the Bloc was supported by Liberals, and now I am hearing the Conservative Party saying it is okay, as well. Does he not share our concerns that political parties would have private information of citizens, such as their birth dates? If he does not have a problem with that, I would be curious to know why he does not have a problem with that.

**Hon. Keith Martin:** Mr. Speaker, it was an issue that I never had an opportunity to address because my time unfortunately ran out. I wish I had 20 minutes to speak on this very important topic. I know members would love to give me that time.

I want to propose something that has to do with census. A lot of our constituents are very concerned with the census and the identification issues to which the member referred.

One of the things I hope the government does is to really look at the census that just took place on two counts. One is the non-core questions that the census asked. A number of my constituents, in their words, are being harassed by Census Canada in obliging them to take part in ancillary aspects of the census which really have little to do with the kind of core information that the census has always been about.

The second issue is the identification mechanisms that are being used and which companies are being allowed to access this information. It was an ancillary company attached to an American company, and I believe that a lot of our constituents have been quite concerned about that.

**Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I will do my best to speak to the bill and talk about the issues related to the Canada Elections Act.

We are here to talk about Bill C-31, in case anyone who has tuned in may be mixed up given the debate we just heard. The object of Bill C-31, as I understand it in my reading, is to amend the Canada Elections Act to improve the integrity of the electoral process by reducing the opportunity for electoral fraud. At least that is one of the elements of Bill C-31.

To start from that basis we must be of the view that there is widespread fraud that justifies the introduction of this bill and justifies our being preoccupied with it today. When I used to negotiate collective agreements for the carpenters union I would sit down at the bargaining table and say that we wanted to change a clause in our agreement. The first question the employer would always ask was, "What has the experience been? Has this clause been a problem that warrants amending it?"

My colleague from Timmins—James Bay pointed out that the actual empirical evidence, the incidence of electoral fraud, at least the convicted cases, is so insignificant and minuscule that it makes me wonder why we would burn up our political energy, our political capital and House of Commons resources to address this particular issue. In the context of all of the things we could be talking about in

terms of elections, how we conduct them and electoral reform, we have seized on this issue of fraud.

I would argue, as my colleague from Ottawa Centre has pointed out, that voter turnout is a far more compelling problem in this country than the almost insignificant incidence of convicted fraud. About 60% of all registered voters in the last election voted, but only 50% of all eligible people voted. I would think that would be a cause of grave concern to anyone who embraces democracy and espouses to want to use our time to enhance the process.

Even the Chief Electoral Officer when he testified before the committee testified that on electoral fraud he did not see the need for these measures, if I can paraphrase him.

My colleague from Timmins—James Bay went through the actual incidents. In the last federal election, of the 10 million people who voted, only one person was actually convicted of fraud. It turned out he was not yet a Canadian citizen. Perhaps he misunderstood the rules. He was a landed immigrant, but he did not have his citizenship. Somehow he did manage to cast a ballot. The system caught him. He was given an absolute discharge. I guess the Chief Electoral Officer determined this was not malicious. It was in fact erroneous. It was more in error. We are glad that the system was working such that the person got tripped up. I believe he received 30 days of community service and then it ultimately wound up in an absolute discharge.

The NDP is passionate about this issue for a number of good reasons. Anyone who heard the speech by the member for Vancouver East would have been moved. My colleague from Vancouver East has tried to address the issue of disenfranchisement and to enable more low income people to vote who otherwise may fall through the cracks. She has gone to enormous lengths. She has even set up voter registration tables with lawyers working pro bono to help people who may not have their requisite pieces of ID, or may for whatever reason not have been enumerated.

I could point out that one of the things that does deserve our attention is the appalling condition of the permanent voters list and the lack of enumeration that goes on in the current regime. As the member representing the riding of Winnipeg Centre where there is a high incidence of low income people and a transient population, the permanent voters list is of almost no value to us in certain neighbourhoods. When the door to door enumeration stopped, we lost track of tens of thousands of people. I say that with no fear of exaggeration or being accused of any contradiction.

● (1735)

The permanent voters list and the full door to door enumeration, those are areas we should be debating in the House of Commons today. I am not sure we should be debating this non-issue, this notion that there is widespread fraud.

*Private Members' Business*

As my colleague from Burnaby—Douglas pointed out, if we did want to write a new law about electoral fraud, we should have pulled together a committee of failed Conservative and Liberal candidates who may be authorities on the subject. Given the way some nominations we know of are run in this country, maybe there are people who have had personally frustrating experiences within their own parties but do not extrapolate that on to the population as a whole.

I am the spokesperson for my party for ethics, privacy and access to information. Under the privacy category, I am appalled that we are considering putting the date of birth on the voter's list. We will now have a voter's list with a name, address, phone number and date of birth. That is a recipe for identity theft. We might as well hand somebody a kit stating that this is all they need to steal somebody's identity and get credit cards, et cetera. This is appalling.

We are in the process at our committee of reviewing PIPA, the Personal Information Protecting Act. It is all about the obligation, the duty, to protect personal identities that we have in our possession. I know how voter's lists end up getting distributed within election campaigns. Sometimes a page gets torn out and given to a canvasser who is told to go canvass a couple of blocks. It gets circulated widely and freely. That alone would make this particular bill subject to a number of legal challenges.

I believe the stricter requirements about identification will have the net effect of disenfranchising people to the point where those barriers will be deemed to be in violation of the charter and the right to cast one's ballot. I believe there is enough in the bill that it will be challenged and probably will not survive that challenge.

The privacy issue alone is enough reason to condemn the bill. The idea is that we are throwing up barriers for low income people, marginalized people, and people with unstable addresses and a lack of ID to vote, which I believe could constitute a charter issue.

The third thing, the most frustrating thing, perhaps, is that in the context of this 39th Parliament it is unlikely that electoral reform will come back to us, although there is a private—

• (1740)

**The Deputy Speaker:** I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member, but the time allotted for orders of the day has expired. The hon. member will have two minutes left when the House resumes debating this bill at some future point.

It being 5:42 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

[*Translation*]

### INCOME TAX ACT

**Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ)** moved that Bill C-207, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (tax credit for new graduates working in designated regions), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, in order to curb the exodus of young graduates to large urban centres and to encourage them to move to the regions to begin their professional careers, I am proposing an amendment to the Income Tax Act to introduce a non-refundable tax credit for new graduates working in designated regions. I myself live in a resource region in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean and I see first-hand everyday the impact of the exodus of young people on our region.

The tax credit would be for individuals who, in the 24 months following the date on which they successfully complete the courses leading to the awarding of a recognized diploma, begin to hold employment in their field of specialization in a designated region.

Recognized diplomas generally mean those awarded for technical training, or college, occupational or university studies. This bill allows individuals, for a maximum of 52 weeks, to benefit from a tax credit totalling a maximum of \$8,000. Based on this year's taxation table, here are a few examples of how beneficial such a tax credit could be.

For an individual earning \$30,000, the amount of federal income tax payable will be \$2,695. This amount will be credited in full with the implementation of such a tax measure for new graduates. If the individual has income of \$40,000, the amount of the credit will be \$4,172, whereas someone who makes \$50,000 will receive a tax credit of \$6,000. I would like to specify that this is a credit for new graduates working in designated regions and that these figures represent the situation of a taxpayer without a basic personal tax credit.

I would like to inform the members of the House of Commons that the Quebec government adopted a similar measure in 2003. In the first year after it was implemented, 2,500 individuals benefited from the new Quebec government tax measure. The year after, the number rose substantially, to 9,700 individuals. The measure had a definite impact on several administrative regions in Quebec.

In 2005, many individuals benefited from this tax credit: more than 1,200 in Abitibi-Témiscamingue, more than 1,600 in the Lower St. Lawrence, almost 800 in Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, more than 1,000 on the North Shore and more than 4,000 in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean. In the second year, almost 10,000 individuals took advantage of the tax credit.

These people might not otherwise have come to the regions to take their first job after graduating. In many cases, they came with spouses who decided to look for work in the regions as well.

*Private Members' Business*

Last spring, the Government of Quebec changed the tax credit, which is now a maximum of \$3,000 per year and can reach \$8,000 over three years, rather than over one year. Bill C-207 provides only for a credit for a one-year period. This will make it easier for us to assess the impact of this sort of measure on young people and will let us make any changes that are needed in due course.

In addition to the large number of young people who are leaving our regions, the shortage of skilled labour is a real problem for the regions, which are losing workers to larger centres. Putting this sort of measure in place will stop the population drain and make it easier to develop processing industries by providing businesspeople with the skilled labour they need.

● (1745)

Specialized workers are needed for many regional jobs, especially in primary resource processing and secondary and tertiary processing in forestry, metallurgy, electrical technology and other fields.

Unfortunately, specialized labour is often easier to find in major centres than in the regions, forcing many businesses to move to large cities or close their doors. Without the labour they need, many businesses in the regions are forced to stay small or have trouble expanding. But there is hope for our young people in the regions.

People who do not live in a resource region cannot truly understand the demographic problems many regions are experiencing. Out-migration is having a devastating impact on regional economies. Young people leaving the regions and new arrivals prefer to settle in major centres. We cannot abandon the men and women living outside these centres. Smaller communities are beginning to decline, with the exodus of young people and the aging of the population.

The exodus of young people is not a new phenomenon, but for many years the birth rate compensated for it. That is no longer the case. That is why, for the past few years, the Government of Quebec has been trying to bring young people back to the regions and encourage them to stay there. Some municipalities have decided to follow suit by offering new residents property tax breaks for a certain number of years. For example, the City of Mont-Joli, in Gaspésie, was offering a three-year property tax holiday to everyone who decided to build a new home there. Businesses are also offering a number of incentives to new property owners. This is just one example to illustrate the urgency of the situation.

The Government of Quebec, some municipalities and some businesses are doing everything they can to save the cities and towns that are part of our shared heritage. The federal government must do its part to keep our young people in the regions and encourage them to settle there. That is why I have decided to introduce Bill C-207 on behalf of my party, the Bloc Québécois. I myself am from a resource region, so it is clear to me that both the Saguenay—Lac Saint-Jean and my riding, Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, are in an unenviable position.

In 2006, the Government of Quebec's tax credit for new graduates cost about \$30 million. We can therefore assume that a similar program on a national scale would cost about four to five times as much. The Government of Canada can afford such a measure, which is sure to benefit all Canadians and Quebecers.

Although the situation is not as serious everywhere in Canada, economic activity has gradually been moving from resource and rural regions to larger centres, a phenomenon that, in places like Saskatchewan and Manitoba, is creating economic difficulty in regions with shrinking populations. This situation remains a concern for every one of Canada's provinces.

I would invite members of this House to support this bill so we can help our resource regions and rural communities keep their young people who, in many cases, want to stay.

● (1750)

**Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge the work accomplished by the hon. member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, because introducing a bill of this kind is a good illustration of the great challenges we face. One of these great challenges is to ensure that our regions—and I come from what is called a resource region—can have access to this development.

I have the following question for the hon. member, even though I think he already mentioned it clearly and eloquently: does his bill to help communities like ours come under federal jurisdiction? I understand full well that the answer is yes, but I would like my colleague to say a few words on the positive aspects of this bill. I know full well that there are some and I want to give the hon. member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord the opportunity to talk about the positive aspects of this bill which, in my opinion, is important.

This shows, yet again, that the people of the Bloc Québécois act with discipline and responsibility.

**Mr. Robert Bouchard:** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his question.

It is true that this bill fits into the regional development policy of the Government of Quebec. Nonetheless, within the constitutional framework, we are currently paying taxes to two levels of government, and so it is only normal that the Government of Canada contribute its share.

We must also recognize that the negative growth in some resource regions is not just occurring in Quebec, but elsewhere as well. This measure has some advantages. Among other things, it offers a financial incentive for a young person to settle in a region. He or she can make plans, invest their money in a home or buy a car. It is an incentive to encourage a young person to settle in a resource region to work and create a home.

*Private Members' Business*

• (1755)

[English]

**Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is certainly an interesting private member's initiative on the part of my colleague, the member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord. Any initiative that encourages and promotes further growth and investment in the regions is one I feel compelled to engage in, study, and give it my foremost attention.

I share many of the same concerns as my colleague. Certainly, I believe in the importance of the regions. That is where we grow our crops, harvest our fish, and mine our minerals. From the regions we make a great contribution to the economy of this country and, indeed, to the overall fabric and mosaic of this great nation. Certainly, some regions are better prepared and are faring better than others, but sometimes initiatives have to be undertaken in order for all Canadians to have the opportunity to engage and share in the wealth of this great nation.

As I said, a great number of areas in the country are doing extremely well. In my area of the country, Cape Breton and eastern Nova Scotia, there has been a tremendous engagement in the Alberta tar sands. The phenomenon of the Alberta tar sands in Fort McMurray is a great resource that is being shared by all Canadians, which is evidenced by the number of people we are seeing go west to work.

I know that many employers in the west now are getting much better at accommodating eastern workers, workers from Quebec and other regions of this country. We see them now going out for six weeks and two weeks back home. The wealth is coming back to the communities and that is a positive thing.

There is a bit of a social void where people are out of the community and away from their families for an extended period of time and that certainly causes concern. They are not able to do volunteer work with the minor hockey associations and various other associations, but at least the income and benefits are coming back into the community. I see that as a positive thing. I do not see it as the answer for the regions. I share the opinion as well that there is a responsibility on the part of the federal government to do all in its power to allow the regions to continue to grow and prosper.

My constituency of Cape Breton—Canso has been a benefactor in recent years of some valuable investments within the community. My colleague identified several that had been undertaken within his constituency. My constituency has benefited from Enterprise Cape Breton Corporation. I recognize that there is no miracle plan, there is no magic cure in developing regions. It is a constant hard work, learn from experience type of initiative and that is how one grows the region.

There has been success and over the last 8 to 10 years the unemployment rate has dropped in my community from 25% to 12.5%. A significant portion of that is because some people have left the area, which is unfortunate, but still we have had growth in the job sector. We have made some good investments and had access to some tools.

The essence of this private member's bill is really giving the regions another tool in order to recruit and retain some of the young

human resource. Any time we can add another tool to the kit to grow the regions, it is imperative that we do.

Nova Scotia has the payroll tax credit. That was a program that was set up by a past Liberal provincial government under the stewardship of former economic development minister Manning MacDonald. That has been a tool that the province of Nova Scotia has really made use of and any companies coming in that invest in that province have really identified that as a tool that has certainly paid benefit to them and has enticed them to come and invest in the province of Nova Scotia.

• (1800)

The past government was committed to regional economic development. We identified in budget 2005 over \$800 million to be allocated to regional economic development from FedNor, ACOA, and other regional economic development agencies. Certainly, that was a testament to the belief the past government had in regional economic development.

Through Enterprise Cape Breton Corporation and ACOA we have been able to invest in infrastructure. There are a couple of communities like Inverness in my constituency where the federal government invested in access to water. A business in our community wanted to expand its capability to process crab. It was very noble. It had a business plan put forward, which meant the purchase of equipment and the investment in human capital, but it also involved access to an incredible supply of fresh water in order to process the crab. The company was not able to make that investment because its business plan was to invest in the equipment for the processing. As a federal agency, we were able to partner with the municipality and allow access to the fresh water. This enabled the business to go forward and create the additional jobs. That was a good partnership.

Preferred loans are another important aspect. We can sometimes access capital in the regions. I am sure anybody who lives in the region or has a business there will know that if a person wants to make an investment in a building in downtown Toronto or Mississauga, there will be no problem getting the banks to line up, but if a person is in a region of this country, it is very tough to get access to capital.

One of the great tools we have used is preferred loans. We can make an investment or a loan to a company, which comes in on the back end of a project. We loan the company money at a lower interest rate and there are a couple of years of holiday before the repayments have to be made. Let me state here that the repayment of these loans is of the same calibre as the repayment loans of the major banks, the major lending organizations. We have had that type because we have been able to stand with those business operators and work with them in the early days of their business.

The final one is targeted investment with which we have had great success. If we want to bring these young people my colleague talked about to the regions, they have to have the opportunities in the regions to which they come.

A lot of times a project may be so vast. We had a \$24 million project in Glace Bay. The company that came in was very willing to roll up its sleeves and make an investment, but it could not carry the entire burden, and some investments had to be made in the structure. We made those key investments in the form of a forgivable loan and we created 1,200 jobs in downtown Glace Bay five years ago. Those people continue to earn wages, receive benefits and contribute to that community. It has been a great investment, and certainly the federal government got its money back twice over.

These tools all go together to increase activity in the regions, to impact on the economy of the regions, and this particular initiative may prove to have some merit. We are not willing to support it outright, but I think it deserves the opportunity to go before committee.

There are a couple of concerns we have. Employment related to a degree is one of the aspects of the bill and we would like to see the criteria on that fleshed out considerably more. With any regulation or program that goes forward, there is an opportunity for abuse, and we certainly do not want that to happen.

However, this particular bill deserves the opportunity to go before the committee. It should be studied. If the proper criteria could be placed in the bill, then we will certainly look at supporting it, but I think I can join with my Liberal caucus colleagues in supporting it going forward to committee.

● (1805)

**Ms. Diane Ablonczy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to engage in debate today with my hon. colleagues on Bill C-207, sponsored by the hon. member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord.

The bill proposes to provide a non-refundable tax credit to new graduates who engage in “qualifying employment” within two years of graduation. I will get into what that means in a minute. The credit would be the lesser of 40% of earnings in the first 52 weeks of qualifying employment or \$8,000 and could be used over two years.

For the purposes of the credit, qualifying employment would involve duties related to the skills the new graduate attained during his or her education or training, and this work would have to be carried out in a “designated region”, which refers to any of the regions listed in the Regional Development Incentives Act. The proposed definition of designated region is one of the things that I will be talking about in a minute.

I think that all of us in the House want to make sure that all regions of the country flourish and have the workers and the skills they need and we also want to encourage young people to look at not just the big centres, the hot centres, but at the advantages of being in another part of the country. I commend my colleague for addressing this issue.

However, although the proposal before us sounds good in theory, there are a number of inconvenient and rather cold practical facts that I think the House needs to consider when looking at this measure.

The first concern is that there appears to be no clear rationale or specific necessity behind the proposed tax credit. There is a kind of feeling that it would be nice to help young people settle wherever

### *Private Members' Business*

they want even if it is not in a hot centre, but there are no demonstrated facts.

The hon. member has not shown that there is a particular shortage of skilled workers in these designated areas. There are no facts to show that employers in the regions are unable to find the skilled workers they need. There is no evidence to show that even if employers are offering good compensation and working conditions skilled workers are unwilling to come.

If there is a real need for skilled workers, then why a measure that only targets new graduates? All skilled workers wanting to relocate into such a region should be considered.

Why propose a tax credit available to recent graduates if there is no demand for their newly acquired skills in a particular region?

Above all, we need to remember that we are the Government of Canada, so a government putting forward a measure to entice recent graduates to work in certain regions rather than others can hardly be called a good national policy.

These are just some of the gaps in the proposed credit brought forward in this bill. There does not appear to be any concrete reason to provide additional incentives, just some suggestion that maybe people could settle and raise families in certain regions, but they could do that anyway.

I think we have to question the effectiveness of the time-limited credit that would provide tax relief for the first 52 weeks of a new graduate's qualifying employment but then would stop. I fail to see how a 52 week tax credit would really be able to attract and retain skilled workers. I fail to see how we would have people settling and raising families, as the member has talked about, for just a 52 week tax credit. It is more likely that a tax credit might bring people into a particular region for a short term, but they then would move on to greener pastures.

If it is true that a tax credit is helpful, then the very generous tax incentives would be needed for skilled workers to choose work in these regions. If that is the case, if there are generous tax credits needed, then would they stay when those credits are no longer available? Is it good policy? Is it a good use of public funds to pay large subsidies that will clearly produce no lasting benefits? I think we would have to conclude that the answer is no.

● (1810)

One also has to question the appropriateness and fairness of using the tax system to provide benefits to graduates choosing to work in certain regions but also to exclude graduates who choose to work in other regions. A new graduate working in one of these designated regions would be able to earn up to about \$56,000 in their first year of employment without paying any federal tax at all, but the same graduate doing the same work a mere kilometre outside the boundary of one of these regions would pay an extra \$8,000 in federal income tax on the same earnings, and the co-worker of this new recruit would also pay \$8,000 in federal tax.

*Private Members' Business*

This can hardly be considerable equitable from anyone's standpoint. I think members of this House would certainly expect to hear complaints from those who do not qualify for the credit. This, of course, would result in pressure to greatly expand the existing list of special designated regions and extend it to all workers who are not recent graduates.

One of the other problems is that the bill does not identify specific occupations or skills that are supposed to be in short supply in any of the designated regions. The bill uses some broad language about eligible work being that for which the duties relate to the graduate's training or education, but that would be extremely difficult to enforce.

In practice, those with training and skills in low demand would receive the same tax credit as those with training and skills that are strongly needed. This goes against the supposed purpose of ensuring that designated regions have better access to needed skills. New graduates could come into these regions with unneeded skills or with low demand for their skills and get the very same \$8,000 tax credit as those that the regions actually really need, so the bill would not help to encourage specific graduates to stay and relocate where they are needed most.

Another issue to be considered is that the proposed credit may cause undue strain on other regions of the country that are also trying to attract Canada's recent graduates. There would be an \$8,000 disparity in the tax burden between new graduates who worked in these designated regions and those who did not. This could mean that regions not fortunate enough to be included in the list of designated regions could experience greater difficulty attracting new talent, especially if they are located near designated regions.

How could it possibly be the role of the Government of Canada to provide incentives to recent recruits to locate in certain regions of the country to the detriment of other regions?

The definition of a designated region leads me to another point, an important point, because the list of these special regions is found in a supplementary section to the Regional Development Incentives Act, which I already have mentioned.

This act has quite an interesting list of regions. For example, the list in this act includes whole provinces and territories: Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Yukon, and the Northwest Territories.

All of those are designated regions under the act, so every single graduate working in any part of these provinces would be eligible for an \$8,000 credit against federal income tax.

Every part of the country that needs equal opportunity to attract workers based on current economic conditions and labour market needs would lose out because of the arrangement being suggested in this bill.

For example, the entire province of Saskatchewan is a designated region under the act, where, says the act, "existing opportunities for productive employment in the region are exceptionally inadequate". But the fact is that unemployment in Saskatchewan is currently at

3.9%, well below the national unemployment average, which is just over 6%.

Another example is Manitoba. It is included in the list, but its unemployment rate is 4.2%, again well below the national average.

The proposed credit would provide inequity among the regions. It would involve significant costs. It would also be a disincentive for areas that need particular skills in being able to attract them.

• (1815)

Because this measure is not shown to be necessary, is poorly targeted and is manifestly unfair, I am unable to support this private member's bill. I trust that my colleagues will carefully consider the points I have raised today and also vote against the bill.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise and speak on Bill C-207 put forward by the hon. member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord. This bill amends the Income Tax Act for the purpose of giving tax credits to new graduates working in designated regions. It is designed to encourage new graduates from universities, colleges and other institutions to settle in economically depressed areas by offering them a non-refundable tax credit for the first year.

I happen to represent a region where employment is very high and the economy very strong, but it was not always so. Could this kind of measure have helped, I wondered? It was also helpful, in considering this bill, to have the opportunity, last week, to meet 30 or so young people from rural British Columbia. Among them were new graduates as well as soon to be graduates. This fuelled my thought process and led me to the following conclusions.

In my opinion, the NDP could, with some reservation, support this bill in principle because it would level the playing field for rural communities, given that urban centres have a clear advantage over them when it comes to recruiting qualified workers. The bill would benefit low and middle income families in rural communities across Canada and help consolidate the social and economic situation of these communities by addressing depopulation and youth out-migration.

That said, it should be pointed out that this bill is but a tiny step in the right direction. For example, it encourages graduates to find work in economically depressed areas, but does so only for one year, as our colleague said a moment ago. The Quebec program from which this bill draws, if I heard correctly, takes a more gradual approach, providing a maximum credit of \$3,000 per year, up to a lifetime maximum of \$8,000. It also includes a financial incentive for three years or more. Personally, I am not sure that a one-year financial incentive would be sufficient to achieve the objectives sought by the hon. member.

Our second reservation about the program has to do with the fact that it could prove to be extremely ineffective if it is not rounded out by a comprehensive regional development plan. The proposed tax credit would be granted to recent graduates working in a region that is, pursuant to the terms of the Regional Development Incentives Act:

...determined to require special measures to facilitate economic expansion and social adjustment.



*Private Members' Business*

And, more precisely, a region where:

...existing opportunities for productive employment in the region are exceptionally inadequate.

Is it wise to send recent graduates to regions where employment opportunities are exceptionally inadequate, according to the terms in the act? For the people who already live in such areas, we should be finding ways to create more jobs before trying to draw more workers.

• (1820)

[*English*]

Instead or perhaps in addition to this tax credit incentive, it would be wiser to enhance the summer career placement program as opposed to cutting it in half, as the Conservatives are proposing to do. This would have the benefit of increasing employment opportunities in economically depressed regions.

The Conservatives saw some flaws in this program that are real but should have and could have been remedied. Rural and low employment communities as well as non-profit sector employers in urban areas should continue to benefit from this program, especially in light of the enormous student debt that new graduates are facing at the moment.

In the last Parliament an all-party committee in a unanimous report by the human resources committee recommended substantial changes to the funding allocation formula for the summer career placement program which is presently based on the number of students in the riding.

When the 2001 census numbers were factored into the formula, there were significant cuts in several ridings, especially the rural, northern, inner city or smaller ones. The committee recommended that disadvantaged and rural populations be factored into riding allocation formulas. The committee also recommended that students over 30, often single mothers, be eligible. Right now only students 15 to 30 may apply.

The summer career placement program is a very valuable one for numerous non-profit groups who could not otherwise offer competitive wages or afford to hire students at all to do valuable work in the community; as well, for small town rural business people to help students avoid having to go to bigger cities to find work.

The government is saying it will better target the program to at risk youth and to ensure that profitable businesses who can afford to pay higher wages do not get subsidized.

I agree that the program could be better targeted but targeting does not mean cutting. The government could target better at current funding levels and have a far greater impact.

The NDP would propose instead to restore full funding for the summer career placement program and implement the committee's recommendations that I have already mentioned. The NDP would also get to work in tackling the root of the problem and that is unaffordable post-secondary education especially for rural and low income families. If we want to attract graduates to economically depressed areas, ideally they should be from these regions and be coming home to work.

Right now tuition and other education costs have grown out of reach for even middle income families in Canada. That is the problem that we must tackle. Debt burdens are overwhelming for Canadian graduates and just as they begin their careers they are foreclosing their options and their career choices.

The traditional Liberal-Conservative answer has been to make student loans more accessible and therefore dramatically increase student debt in Canada. It has allowed students from rural areas to benefit and to get post-secondary education, but they simply complete their program burdened with unacceptable debt.

As I said, what we would propose is to tackle the root of the problem by making post-secondary education more affordable, by creating a national program of non-repayable grants that would prevent these huge debt levels. We would also propose to overhaul the student loan system which has become very inflexible.

Retargeting to those in greater need is really a piece of the solution that I hope my colleague from the Bloc, who has proposed this bill, would consider as a partial solution to the problem that is faced in certain areas.

• (1825)

[*Translation*]

The intention behind the bill is commendable. The bill represents the beginnings of a solution to a serious problem in certain regions of Canada. However, I urge the hon. member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord to convince his colleagues from the Bloc and all members of the House to support the NDP's vision for post-secondary education, which proposes a global, comprehensive view, in order to inspire hope in our students and in Canada's rural areas and small communities.

**Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I was surprised at the speech the parliamentary secretary gave earlier. I had the feeling I was in another world or on another planet.

It was the sort of speech I would expect from someone who had no idea what the regions are going through or what has been happening in this country for the past 50 or 60 years. I am talking not just about Quebec, but about the whole country. It was the sort of speech I would expect from someone who had not visited the regions across the country and did not understand that the populations of these regions are dwindling.

*Private Members' Business*

Earlier, the member mentioned Newfoundland. If there is one place that has a problem with depopulation and the loss of its young people, it is Newfoundland. Across the province, the population—especially the youth population—is declining at an alarming rate. This points to what I would call the old myths about the regions. As these myths would have it, larger centres support the so-called outlying, remote or resource regions—they have been called by so many names over the years that it is confusing. This is absolutely false. The opposite is true. These regions are called resource regions because they provide products and natural resources that allow industry and commerce in larger centres to prosper. We talk about resource regions, but we could also talk about the human resources the regions have provided for larger centres. This assistance is extremely important. Often, the regions lose their most skilled, best trained young people, who leave to train in larger centres and are working there today. They are the lifeblood of the larger centres. There is a myth about the regions.

There is another myth. I regularly hear that there is less entrepreneurship in the regions. This is also absolutely false. That is why my colleague from Chicoutimi—Le Fjord introduced this bill. It is absolutely not true that there is less entrepreneurship in the regions. The opposite is true, relatively speaking. All the studies that have been conducted over the years by the Government of Canada and the Government of Quebec prove it.

I would just like to invite the parliamentary secretary, if she ever has the time, to read a Senate report released in December 2006, entitled “Understanding Freefall: The Challenge of the Rural Poor”. It talks about the entire country.

The report shows what is happening right now. It is an excellent snapshot, published in December 2006, and I read it during the holiday break. I was very happy to have read it, because it confirmed exactly what I already knew. It confirms exactly what is happening in the regions of this country. In fact, the regions are becoming less populated. The population is aging. The population decline is both increasing and accelerating in the regions. For a country, as much for Quebec as for Canada, this is extremely dangerous, because our territory must be populated. It must be populated wisely. It must be populated while supporting rural communities and all communities of the regions.

But how do we support them? Of course, the bill introduced by my colleague from Chicoutimi—Le Fjord is step in the right direction. It has been quite successful in Quebec. Quebec is not only area to experiment with such a measure. It was also tried internationally, in some European countries. And it has produced results. In fact, to suggest that there is no evidence of a lack of qualified labourers in the regions is to ignore the facts at all cost.

Consider this example concerning health care. At present, there is a desperate shortage of qualified personnel in the regions, to the point that it is becoming nearly impossible to offer all services in all regions. This is happening not only in Gaspésie and the Bas-Saint-Laurent, but also in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Newfoundland and all rural regions of the country.

There is more. The declining population of the regions and the departure of young people mean that, as the population ages, there is constantly growing pressure to increase services.

● (1830)

Another phenomenon has to do with the services that should be offered by all governments. Sometimes the cost of these services increase and then the services are dropped. Rural roads and transportation services are being dropped. That is what is happening where I come from.

This afternoon, during question period, I asked a question. I had a good example and I asked a question about the Mont-Joli airport. This is a very concrete example of a region that is being penalized because the transportation system has been abandoned. The transportation system has been privatized and now the government is washing its hands of it.

My region has a major company that is well known by everyone. I do not want to advertise, but I am talking about the Telus head office. The head office of this company is currently threatening to leave Rimouski, which is right next to Mont-Joli, because the plane that arrives from Vancouver—carrying the big bosses—can no longer land in Mont-Joli. It is as simple as this: the airport no longer has the necessary instruments. If there is bad weather, they land in Quebec City. People are currently threatening to leave the region. This head office is extremely important. I am not talking about a head office that employs 20 or 30 people. I am talking about a very large head office. That is an example of what the federal government can do, and an example of what the federal government did not do.

I can give another example cited by my colleague for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine recently, and that is rail transportation. Establishing companies in an area where there is no longer any rail transportation and where roads are inadequate is a challenge. Yet that is what regions are asked to do. Today, regions are asked to make that effort. They are asked to be even more creative than major centres, and to get by with the little they are given. If we wish to build a country such as Quebec, people must live in the regions, our land must be populated, there must be quality of life, people must have services. For example, a young pregnant woman from Sainte-Anne-des-Monts must have access to a gynecologist. This is a good example of specialized employment in the health field. If the individual has to travel 200 km because her pregnancy is high risk, I do not think that she will stay in Sainte-Anne-des-Monts for long. We must help her, we must help these young people return to the regions. Jobs are available. It is not a waste of time for the regions. It is not a waste of time provided that measures such as those presented by my colleague from Chicoutimi—Le Fjord are implemented. We must realize that the federal government must assume a role like the one presently taken by the Government of Quebec. That is not the case. We must realize that the federal government must support regional development measures proposed by the Government of Quebec and by other provincial governments. It is extremely important because if the federal government does not support these measures, that means that we are paying taxes for absolutely no reason, and I am more and more convinced of that.

*Private Members' Business*

You know to which party I belong. I hope that Quebec will become sovereign so that we can truly go ahead with regional development in our area, so that young people can return and so that we can build a country throughout the territory, for the well-being of all those living in Quebec.

• (1835)

[English]

**Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to engage in debate today in the House on Bill C-207 sponsored by the hon. member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord.

Bill C-207 proposes an income tax credit for new graduates taking employment in certain regions. The credit would be equal to 40% of earnings from the first 52 weeks of qualifying employment to a maximum credit of \$8,000. “Qualifying employment” would be employment in a “designated region” and employment duties would need to be related to the graduate's education. A “designated region”, for the purpose of the credit, is an area defined in section 3 of the Regional Development Incentives Act.

There are a number of very significant problems with this bill that should be of concern to the members of the House. The bill proposes to create a tax credit to address skill shortages in designated regions but no evidence is provided as to the existence of these shortages. The “designated regions” that the bill references are drawn from a list that has not been updated in more than two decades. It simply does not account for the economic changes that have taken place during that period of time.

The credit proposed in the bill would also introduce very serious inequities in the tax system: inequities between recent graduates and those who graduated early, and inequities between new graduates who work in different regions.

Finally, the credit would entail a very large fiscal cost for a tax measure that would ultimately not result in new jobs for new graduates anywhere in the country. This squanders public money and diverts fiscal resources away from measures that could actually help regional development that do create the type of economic environment within all regions of Canada to help them grow and prosper.

The bill tries to use the tax system to encourage new graduates to work in certain regions of Canada in order to address perceived skill shortages but attempts to do that in ways that, in the end, would make the tax measure ineffective. The bill, for example, would only provide tax relief with respect to a new graduate's first 52 weeks of qualified employment, but if the proposed credit were truly needed to encourage new graduates to work in designated regions, what would happen after the initial 52 weeks when the credit is no longer available?

Why would incentives not be provided to other skilled workers who are not new graduates if the concern is skill shortages in these regions? Clearly, this type of measure cannot yield long term benefits to regions and I am not even sure it would have an incremental impact in the short term beyond reducing taxes for a selected group of workers.

Another concern with the bill is that it does not make any attempt to target skill sets that are in short supply in a “designated region” or

could benefit from its development. This makes me question what the economic rationale is behind the bill.

This brings me to a concern regarding the definition of “designated region”. The credit is only provided to new graduates who take up work in a “designated region”, a term taken from the Regional Development Incentives Act. The term refers to a region in which “existing opportunities for productive employment in the region are exceptionally inadequate”.

The list of regions from this act has not been updated in 20 years. This certainly does not reflect the current economic situation of Canada's regions. Let me give two examples to support my point.

On this list, the provinces of Saskatchewan and Manitoba are included in their entirety and yet, in October 2006, both provinces had unemployment rates two full percentage points below the national average, which is presently slightly above 6%. With facts like these, I find it hard to support the idea that these are regions with limited employment opportunities and that new graduates in these provinces should pay up to \$8,000 less in federal income tax than those not working in designated regions.

This leads me to my next point, which concerns the significant inequities that would be created if Bill C-207 were adopted. The bill could create inequities in the tax system by discriminating between regions and groups of graduates. Graduates who finish their programs around the same time but live in different regions could face entirely different income tax burdens during their first year of employment. As well, two graduates working in the same job and region but whose graduation dates are a year apart would also face an \$8,000 gap in their respective tax burdens. This is patently unfair.

Finally, Bill C-207 proposes a tax credit that is also incredibly expensive. Estimates suggest that the credit could cost up to \$600 million each year to the federal government. These are funds that would be taken away from other priorities, such as measures to help make the tax system fairer, foster economic growth and benefit all Canadians, regardless of where they work or live.

• (1840)

I am aware that some provinces have credits or, in some cases, tuition rebates for new graduates who work in their home provinces or who relocate there. Saskatchewan, Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and, most recently, Manitoba, have introduced these. Most of these measures are fairly recent and there is no evidence to date that they have had an impact on graduates' choices of where to work and yet Bill C-207 proposes to spend \$600 million on a tax measure for which the outcome is completely uncertain.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

The success of Canada's economy is well-known by the members of the House. We have the strongest growth on record of the G-7 since 1996 and we are currently enjoying the lowest unemployment rate in 30 years. Given the current economic climate, new graduates can generally find excellent opportunities to work in many parts of the country, including regions that the hon. member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord seeks to support with generous and unwarranted tax incentives.

An efficient and effective labour market is necessary for a country to succeed in a highly competitive global economy. Workers must be able to pursue the best employment opportunities across the country and practise their occupation wherever those opportunities exist. However, Bill C-207 strives for the opposite. It attempts to use the tax system to reduce labour mobility.

I am sure all members of the House would agree that it is important to support the creation of economic opportunities all across Canada, opportunities that help to keep our best and brightest in this country. I am sure all members of the House would also agree that it is important to provide a helping hand to those who need support in joining the workforce, to attract the immigrants Canada will need in the years ahead and to provide our young people with the training and education opportunities they need to compete in a knowledge-based economy.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The time for consideration of private member's business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

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## ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*Translation*]

### FORESTRY INDUSTRY

**Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, on October 17, 2006, I questioned the Minister of Industry in this House, asking him if he would be prepared to announce an emergency plan for the forestry industry to make up for all the difficulties faced by that industry. These difficulties arose from problems with the dispute with the Americans and in spite of the softwood lumber agreement which the Bloc Québécois supported. This was not a perfect agreement, far from it, but it was better than continuing the dispute, which was pointless. The companies could not afford to continue any longer. They also needed an aid package, and the Bloc Québécois had put forward a concrete proposal containing approximately ten different measures.

One of the proposed measures was an income support program for older workers. Many had been laid off and, sadly, more have been laid off since. We also proposed an economic diversification program for forestry-dependent communities; a special tax status for the 128,000 private woodlot owners in Quebec; the acceleration of equipment amortization; a program to diversify lumber markets, and financial compensation for maintaining the road and forest network. In spite of all these proposals, the federal government did not really take any action to remedy the situation.

On January 22, 2007, one week before Parliament resumed sitting, stakeholders representing the whole forestry industry came to Ottawa and made representations somewhat similar to those of the Bloc Québécois. They told the federal government that it does not seem to realize that the forestry industry is going through a major crisis, that there are problems with allowances in certain provinces, that there is still the issue with the United States, particularly the significant drop in prices, and that the whole pulp and paper sector is in trouble, which has a domino effect on the whole forestry industry. Therefore, the industry expects some action.

On the same day that forestry industry stakeholders were in Ottawa, the president of the FTQ, the Fédération des travailleurs du Québec, Mr. Massé, and the Bloc Québécois leader, held a joint press conference and asked for the implementation of effective programs.

The president of the FTQ said:

This is not the first time that we are asking for a revitalization program for secondary and tertiary processing, a government-funded program for the redevelopment of energy-consuming technologies in the context of sustainable development, loan programs and tax credits to support businesses that depend on the forest.

There is none of that in the federal government's initiative. There is absolutely nothing for the renewal of technology or infrastructure. It looks as if the government has not noticed that there is a crisis in the forestry industry. Thousands of jobs have been lost. The workers affected were often very well qualified for these jobs, but they cannot easily find work elsewhere. They were left to fend for themselves.

Today, I am rising in this House to ask the government if it is going to make a decision. Will it at least tell us that the upcoming budget will include measures for the forestry industry, which really needs help?

The Standing Committee on Industry, Sciences and Technology has worked to produce a report on manufacturing sectors. It should soon be released. It will be a unanimous and strong report. We cannot provide details today, because it is still confidential, but I hope that the parliamentary secretary and the government will heed the messages that relate to the forestry industry in the report. However, the government has already been in possession of the assistance plan proposed by the Bloc Québécois for months now.

Can the government spokesperson tell me whether or not measures will be taken for the forestry industry, which really needs help?

• (1845)

[*English*]

**Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, during question period on October 17, 2006, the hon. member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup raised the issue of federal support for the softwood lumber industry.

The question of the hon. member gives the government yet another opportunity to show the House that the government is delivering on its commitments.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

From the outset, we committed to resolve the long standing softwood lumber dispute. Less than nine months after taking office, the government made good on its pledge. The softwood lumber agreement is supported by two countries, all lumbering producing provinces and over 90% of the Canadian softwood producers.

This historic agreement gives our producers stable, predictable access to the U.S. market, it ends years of costly litigation and it brings economic certainty to companies, communities and workers across Canada. It returns over \$5 billion Canadian in duty deposits to our softwood producers, a significant infusion of capital for the industry. In fact, virtually all of the duties are now in the hands of the producers. That is action.

Resolution of the softwood lumber dispute was a clear demonstration of our government's commitment to the industry. Canadians asked the government to come up with a resolution that provided stability for the industry and protected the livelihoods of workers, communities and families, not only in Quebec but across the country. We have done this.

Throughout the process to negotiate and implement this agreement, we made it abundantly clear that the government recognized the importance of the forest products industry to the Canadian economy. We are keenly aware that there are challenges facing the industry, but we are not just talking about these challenges, like the members opposite. We are addressing them.

As the hon. member will recall, we announced in budget 2006 a \$400 million investment to encourage the long term competitiveness of the forest industry to address the pine beetle infestation in western Canada and to assist worker adjustment.

We are delivering on these commitments too. On October 17, the new government announced a new cost shared program with the provinces and territories. The targeted initiative for older workers is a two year initiative that will be cost shared with the provinces and territories and assist thousands of older workers. It addresses the needs of older workers who have lost their jobs in communities where the local economy is facing ongoing unemployment or where industries such as forestry are affected by downsizing and closures.

Earlier this month the government announced measures to fight the mountain pine beetle and address its impacts on forests and communities in British Columbia. We will work closely with the B. C. government to develop a comprehensive strategy to battle this infestation. It will include measures to stop the eastward spread of the beetle and to help affected communities develop new forest products, markets, industries and services to ensure their long term economic well-being.

My hon. colleague, the Minister of Natural Resources, is working urgently to deliver on other measures to improve industry competitiveness.

The government has and will continue to support the Canadian forest industry. The actions that we have taken are continuing to make this clear. It is clear to Canadians and it should be clear to the members opposite. Actions speak louder than words.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Paul Crête:** Mr. Speaker, I agree with my colleague. The only reason the softwood lumber agreement was passed is that the Bloc Québécois supported the Conservative Party. The other two parties in this House voted against it, and if it had not been for the Bloc Québécois' support, the agreement would not have been passed in Parliament and the crisis would now be even worse than it was.

That said, there is another important consideration: we need a real assistance program. We are helping older workers re-enter the workforce, and that is fine, but 20% of the people who were laid off are too old to re-enter the workforce. We cannot find new jobs for them. The Conservative government still has not provided any tools, such as an older workers assistance program, to help these people bridge the gap between being laid off and collecting old age security. Recently, the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development created another committee, but it will be six months before it reports.

Can the parliamentary secretary assure us that the next budget will contain concrete measures like the ones the Bloc Québécois proposed in its action plan in September to enable this industry to recover its vitality and ensure its competitiveness?

We are going through hard times. The softwood lumber agreement drove prices down. The agreement now covers nearly the entire market. We have no choice but to pay the taxes. The situation will remain difficult.

Can we be sure that the government will have a clear plan to help the forest industry, and that it will make its plan known in the budget, at the very latest?

• (1850)

[*English*]

**Mr. Colin Carrie:** Mr. Speaker, I am surprised that the hon. member's party has reservations about the older workers' initiative. Just one short year ago the Bloc Québécois put forth a motion that requested, among other measures, the creation of an adjustment program for older workers in the textile and apparel industries. Not only that, but in May 2006 the hon. member himself introduced two further motions, each of which requested a program be created for older workers.

We have delivered on the targeted initiative for older workers, and more. We have delivered for older workers not only in the forestry and apparel and textile industries, but anywhere there is a reliance on a single industry or employer. We have delivered a program to help them upgrade their skills, gain work experience or receive career counselling. We have delivered to the provinces and territories a program that offers them flexibility in identifying communities and projects under the initiative.

This program could help up to 10,000 older workers develop new skills and find new jobs over the next two years so they can continue to provide their invaluable expertise and experience to the Canadian workforce as well as their communities.

*Adjournment Proceedings**[Translation]*

**The Deputy Speaker:** The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands

adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24 (1).

(The House adjourned at 6:52 p.m.)

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