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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, May 30, 2007

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, May 30, 2007

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

•(1400)

[English]

The Speaker: It being Wednesday, we will now have the singing of the national anthem led by the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

[Members sang the national anthem]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

CLASS OF 1997

Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, June 2 will mark 10 years since I was elected. I first took my seat in the House of Commons in the 36th Parliament. The overwhelming feeling of responsibility I felt the first day I sat in the chamber stays with me 10 years later. It is a feeling I hope I never lose as long as I enjoy this great privilege.

In the 140 year history of Canada, there have been a total of 4,015 members of Parliament and it is indeed an honour to be one of those chosen to serve.

The elections of the 36th, 37th, 38th and 39th Parliaments were each unique and offer me some great memories. An incredible amount has happened in the past 10 years. There have been some tough battles to fight. Some were won, some were lost, but all were worth the effort.

The class of 1997 brought 94 new members to the House of Commons. Ten years later 34 remain. To those of us remaining, happy anniversary, and to those who have supported me over those years, especially my wife and family, I thank them.

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WATERLOO

Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on May 27 the city of Waterloo celebrated its 150th anniversary.

From Mennonite founders, Waterloo has evolved into an international community that reflects the world.

From a tradition of barn raising, we evolved into an insurance capital for Canada. Instead of Conestoga wagons, we now have BlackBerries.

From a one room school, we have become an educational powerhouse, with three excellent post-secondary institutions: Wilfrid Laurier University, the University of Waterloo and Conestoga College.

From old time mills, foundries, brewers and distillers, we now have a high tech research park, Advanced Manufacturing, the Centre for International Governance, the Perimeter Institute and we are part of Canada's Technology Triangle and Communtech.

Waterloo has also just been named the top intelligent community in the world. Waterloo is proof that investing in education and training, along with research and development, is the key to Canada's economic prosperity.

Congratulations Waterloo.

* * *

•(1405)

[Translation]

SPEECH AND HEARING AWARENESS MONTH

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, May is Speech and Hearing Awareness Month, and even through it is almost over, as is my habit, I want to draw members' attention to a very important cause: defending the rights of the deaf and hearing impaired, who represent more than 10% of the population.

There is much cause for celebration this year. First, on May 17, the CRTC finally handed down a decision requiring all English and French language broadcasters to caption all programs. I should also mention the success of the new CRIM software, which is a major advance in closed captioning. Starting in September 2007, CPAC will finally offer live captioning in French of question period. This is a wonderful innovation, because from now on, the broadcast will be in real time thanks to voice recognition.

I have championed this cause for a number of years, and today I am happy to celebrate these victories with the deaf and hearing impaired community. I will be closely monitoring the work of the round table to check the quality of the captioning.

Statements by Members

[English]

MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY

Mrs. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today men and women from across Canada have come to Ottawa to tell their government that we are in a manufacturing crisis. We are losing good jobs, jobs with decent pay and benefits, at an alarming rate and women bear the brunt of this crisis.

With diminishing jobs with benefits and more jobs without, women struggle to maintain a work family balance. Instead of making life easier for ordinary families, the government persists in denying women access to employment insurance, adequate maternity and parental leave, a national affordable housing program, affordable regulated child care, and access to training so women do not end up in minimum wage or dead end jobs without benefits.

The crisis is here and now. We need an industrial manufacturing strategy to keep good jobs in Canada. We need benefits for families to ensure a healthy work family balance. It is long past time for government to act.

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OUTSTANDING CITIZENS

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, great leaders and great organizations often come together to make a real difference in a community.

Tomorrow evening the Wallaceburg Chamber of Commerce will honour Mari Cole as its citizen of the year. Mari is a member of the hospital auxiliary and a founding member of the local child care centre. She is actively involved in minor sports, physician recruitment and the Wallaceburg Trails Association. Congratulations Mari.

Also, this past Saturday evening the Wallaceburg Kinsmen Club celebrated its 75th anniversary and awarded only its seventh honorary life membership to Mr. Mike Childs.

Mike Childs died in February 2005 at the age of 45. During his all too short life, Mike was a leader in the Kinsmen Club and was a driving force behind virtually every community project in Wallaceburg. Mike's passing is still deeply felt by the citizens of Wallaceburg.

I ask the House to join me in recognizing two outstanding citizens, Mari Cole and the late Mike Childs.

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CROSS LAKE ARMY CADET CORPS

Ms. Tina Keeper (Churchill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to pay tribute to the youth of the Cross Lake Army Cadet Corps in my riding of Churchill.

These 60 cadets represent discipline and dedication to themselves, their families and their community.

Since the program was founded, it has had an extraordinarily positive effect on Cross Lake. Its success has motivated other youth and it has a long waiting list.

These youth have been fortunate also to have the dedicated vision and leadership of local leaders such as community councillor Bob Smith who has worked tirelessly to make this program a reality.

I am honoured to be able to participate in the official review of the Cross Lake Cadets on June 17. I look forward to witnessing their exceptional work in the community firsthand.

I stand with pride to recognize the important youth program sponsored by Canada's military and in particular, the Cross Lake Cadet Corps which is one of only two in aboriginal communities in Canada.

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[Translation]

FESTIVAL FUNDING

Mr. Luc Harvey (Louis-Hébert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is ironic to hear the opposition express concern about federal support for festivals, because as we all know, the Bloc will never be in a position to help them and the former Liberal government was far too busy helping its friends under the sponsorship program.

In budget 2007, we announced additional funding, and we are now beginning to establish, transparently, the framework and criteria for this new program, which will target small and medium size events, not just major festivals. The new program will be in place at the end of the summer.

In the meantime, our government is continuing to support festivals in our beautiful province. This year, Quebec City's Festival d'été international will receive \$450,000, the Just for Laughs Festival will receive \$50,000 and the Montreal jazz festival will receive \$850,000.

A number of festivals have suffered for several years because of the incompetence of the former Liberal government, but one thing is certain: the Bloc will never be able to help them.

I am proud to be part of the Government of Canada, which can take steps to help everyone.

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● (1410)

PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND STUDENT SPORTS

Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, for the 13th consecutive year, the Fédération québécoise du sport étudiant has named May physical education and student sports month for young people in Quebec.

Kim Saint-Pierre, goaltender for the winning women's hockey team at the Olympic Games in Torino, agreed to be spokesperson for the event.

More than 1,280 schools participated in this campaign to encourage students to participate in sports, and close to 530,000 elementary and high school students from across Quebec tackled different challenges with the goal of achieving healthier lifestyles. While the youngest were invited to take part in various activities in an atmosphere reminiscent of a medieval fair, the older students were provided with training booklets in order to track their progress.

Although this physical activity month was essentially geared towards children and teens, I would like to remind everyone that regardless of our age, it is important to incorporate an activity into our daily lives.

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[English]

SCOTT THORKELSON

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to and give thanks for the life of Scott Thorkelson.

Scott was the member of Parliament for Strathcona from 1988 to 1993. On May 19 he passed away suddenly at only 49 years of age.

Scott was an Icelandic Viking from Gimli, Manitoba. He was passionate about politics and public service throughout his life. He was a leader in the Progressive Conservative youth wing, served as executive assistant to former fisheries minister, John Fraser, and was one of the youngest members of Parliament when he was elected.

Scott remained active at all three levels of politics and played a key role in the merger of Canada's two Conservative parties when he served as co-chair of the national policy committee.

Scott served his community tirelessly as a fundraiser for Big Brothers, finance director and chairman of the board for special Olympics Alberta, and president of the Scandinavian Business Association

Scott will be remembered by his many friends for his natural ability to connect with people, his sincerity and his genuine interest in helping people.

Scott was devoted to his family. All members of the House will join me in offering our condolences and saluting a dedicated Canadian who left us much too young. He will be missed.

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PHILIPPINES

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, according to groups such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, since 2001 over 750 social activists, human rights lawyers, church workers and journalists have been killed in the Philippines in politically motivated and extrajudicial executions.

[Translation]

This is why my constituents gave me a petition, which I will table later on today, to express their concerns about this situation.

[English]

I support this initiative and this petition, and I ask the government to look into this issue and to report back to Parliament as soon as possible.

As I am sure hon. members will agree, it is our collective responsibility to defend freedom, human rights, and the rule of law whenever and wherever they are threatened.

Statements by Members

THE SENATE

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians knew it all along but now it is official. We finally have confirmation that Liberal senators have been caught manipulating democracy by their disingenuous use of their majority in the Senate.

Their unaccountable behaviour in pushing Bill C-288 through a Senate committee in mere seconds has been found by the Speaker of the Senate to be a violation of the privileges of the Senate. These Liberal senators have been caught red-handed.

Canadians are also concerned that these same Liberal senators have now delayed the Senate term limits bill for one full year. Not a happy birthday. Liberal stonewalling continues to demonstrate to Canadians that the party opposite is more concerned with protecting its entitlements than delivering accountability.

Despite being on record in favour of Senate term limits, the Leader of the Opposition has been unable or unwilling to persuade his Liberal colleagues to accept the change.

The choice is crystal clear for Canadians. The Prime Minister is delivering strong leadership and this Conservative Party is delivering accountability.

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DANNY MALANCHUK

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today with great sadness at the loss of a very good friend and a friend to all of us in Parliament, Mr. Danny Malanchuk. He was a trusted friend, a true member of CBC News and a talented journalist.

Danny was born in Montreal, was married to Lorna and has a son, Andrew. Danny joined CBC News in 1980 as a writer/broadcaster on regional TV programs produced in Ottawa. He was also one of the true original founders of Newsworld in 1989, working on political programs created for the network in New York.

Danny was known by many of us in the House of Commons as a genuine, kind and caring individual who loved the game of pool and loved chasing little white balls around a golf course.

In commemoration of Danny's favourite word, "feckless", notes of condolences can be sent to www.feckless.ca.

At this time I would like to acknowledge his wife and his son and tell them that her husband and his father was a very kind man and will be sadly missed by all of us in the NDP and all of us in the House of Commons. May God bless his memory.

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• (1415)

CANADIAN COAST GUARD

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the full scope of the courageous and professional work of the men and women of the Canadian Coast Guard all too often goes unnoticed by many Canadians.

Oral Questions

One recent event, however, brought that professionalism to full view. This past spring over 100 fishing vessels were trapped and stranded in ice conditions off Newfoundland and Labrador that were dangerous and considered almost unimaginable even to an experienced mariner. Lives and vessels were in danger and the situation appeared very bleak.

Men and women of the Coast Guard, men and women like Helen Doucette, Renee Gates, Howard Kearley, Crystal Smith, Paul Veber, Chris Whelan, Barry Witherall, Kevin Champion, John Butler, Stephen Decker, Ray Browne and Jane Kelsey stepped up, with their Captain Brian Penney in command, and brought all these vessels home.

Today, on behalf of the mariners of Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte and all of Newfoundland and Labrador, I thank the Canadian Coast Guard Newfoundland and Labrador region for bringing every one of our proud fishermen home. It was a job well done.

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[Translation]

ADÉODAT SAINT-PIERRE

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we were very saddened to learn recently of the passing of Adéodat Saint-Pierre, at the age of 72. Mr. Saint-Pierre was a major contributor to the forestry industry and rural communities in Quebec.

For over 50 years, he led many important struggles to improve the outlook for lumber producers throughout Quebec, and to ensure the survival of villages and rural communities. Mr. Saint-Pierre served as the president of the Syndicat des producteurs forestiers du Bas-Saint-Laurent and the Fédération des producteurs de bois du Québec. He also founded, in 1990, the Coalition Urgence rurale du Bas-Saint-Laurent. In May 2001, Mr. Saint-Pierre was honoured by the National Assembly with the Hommage bénévolat-Québec award.

Deeply committed to his community, Mr. Saint-Pierre cared about the economic development of his region and of Quebec as a whole. He was a born leader and unifier.

I would like to pay tribute to this staunch defender of the regions, a role model to follow in building the Quebec of tomorrow.

* * *

[English]

M&M MEAT SHOPS

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on May 12 of this year, the 19th annual M&M Meat Shop's charity barbecue day was held and it was a great success.

On that day, franchisees, staff and thousands of volunteers at 430 M&M Meat Shops across Canada joined together to raise \$1.91 million for the Crohn's & Colitis Foundation of Canada. To date, M&M Meat Shops franchisees, customers and volunteers have raised more than \$14 million to fight this affliction.

Every cent raised will go directly to the foundation to help find a cure for inflammatory bowel disease, a disease that affects more than 170,000 Canadian men, women and children.

On behalf of all my colleagues, I thank all the franchisees, their staff and the numerous volunteers who made this possible.

I would like to say a particular word of thanks to Guy and Collette Galipeau who own the franchise I visited that day in Ottawa—Vanier. I congratulate them and all the M&M franchisees and ask them to keep up the good work.

* * *

THE SENATE

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, sadly, today marks the first birthday of the bill to limit the terms of senators. Our government introduced this bill because we, along with the majority of Canadians, firmly believe the Senate must change.

It is unacceptable that in the year 2007, 140 years after Confederation, unelected and unaccountable senators can serve up to 45 years. The Liberal Senate refuses to act, refuses to accept change and refuses to be accountable to Canadians.

The Liberal Senate's behaviour on Senate term limits represents two things. First, Liberal senators feel entitled to their entitlements. Clearly they favour entitlements for a privileged few ahead of good government for all.

Second, the delay of the Senate term limits bill demonstrates that the leader of the Liberal Party just cannot get it done. He is on the record as supporting term limits for senators but his own caucus refuses to act and refuses to listen to its own leader. Once again, he is showing that he just does not have what it takes to lead his own party, let alone the country.

ORAL QUESTIONS

● (1420)

[English]

CANADIAN FORCES

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today we saw a proud military family grieving the loss of their son, Corporal Matthew Dinning, who died serving our country. This family did not receive fair treatment from the government to cover the cost of their son's funeral. We saw the government holding a press conference at the last minute to try to justify its lack of support.

How did the Prime Minister let this happen?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, upon taking office, the Minister of National Defence instructed and made it clear to the Department of National Defence that this government would pay all reasonable funeral costs, even if those exceeded the limit that had been established by the previous government.

I understand that the chief of defence staff has confirmed that to be the case and that National Defence is obviously talking to various families to ensure that policy has been followed.

Oral Questions

I understand there have been discussions between the Dinning family and the Department of National Defence and obviously it is not appropriate for me to discuss the details here in the House of Commons.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence said that and the Prime Minister repeated it today but in saying so, they are misleading the House. This is the problem.

It took courageous parents to share their grief on television to get the government to act. How long will the Dinning family need to wait before receiving full compensation for the cost of their son's funeral?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again the government obviously believes that the death of Corporal Dinning was a terrible tragedy and something that we appreciate because it was in the service of his country.

At the same time, the Minister of National Defence's instructions have been clear. There have been discussions between government officials and the family. All reasonable costs will be covered and that is for them to resolve.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, the Minister of National Defence has shown his incompetence and insensitivity. The Prime Minister must make up his mind to ask for the minister's resignation.

I am asking the Prime Minister to take responsibility for this matter and to ensure that the Dinning family, and any other family in such unacceptable circumstances, be compensated in full for the funeral expenses of our soldiers.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the policy of the Minister of National Defence is clear. Right from the beginning, he instructed officials to pay all reasonable expenses even if they exceed the limits established by the former government.

We are in discussions with this family about reasonable expenses. I believe that this matter should be settled outside the House of Commons.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if that were true, why is it that the Dinning family had to come to Ottawa to hold a press conference in the first place? A very private family had to go public on the unpaid funeral expenses of their son so that no other family would go through what they have suffered, that is, sending bills to a government that would not even take the trouble to reply and having to listen to a minister question the integrity of the family in the House of Commons.

Will the Prime Minister ensure that no mother and no family suffers this again? Will he take the first step and fire the Minister of National Defence?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, last year when I took office I directed that families receive full compensation for normal funeral and burial costs. It may happen that for some reason a few of the families may not have received their proper compensation and I have asked the

CDS to ensure that families are contacted to ensure they receive their full compensation for normal death benefits.

● (1425)

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the family did exactly as they were told by DND. The minister has to accept this responsibility.

[*Translation*]

The most troubling aspect of this situation is that the Minister of National Defence chose to blame his officials rather than accepting responsibility. The soldiers' families deserve much better than that.

Will the Prime Minister immediately ask for the resignation of this disgraced minister?

[*English*]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said previously, when I took office last year I directed that families receive full compensation for normal funeral and burial costs. Through some anomaly, a few families may not have received full compensation. I have asked the CDS to ensure that all families are contacted and that they receive full compensation.

* * *

[*Translation*]

OPTION CANADA

Mr. Gilles Dupeppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday Judge Grenier admitted that his mandate over Option Canada did not allow him to investigate federal expenses because he had no jurisdiction to do so. He therefore did not know how the love-in was paid for.

Yesterday, the Prime Minister kept saying he wanted to turn the page on the Option Canada scandal even though it was so very important to him to get to the bottom of the sponsorship scandal two years ago.

Why is the Prime Minister refusing to call a public inquiry into the Option Canada affair, when Judge Grenier's report clearly shows that the Referendum Act was violated in 1995 because of federal funding?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, compliance with provincial law is a provincial concern. The provincial government launched an inquiry, which resulted in a report and the facts are known. In the meantime, as far as federal expenses are concerned, we have received reports from the Auditor General. The former government launched the Gomery inquiry. We received Mr. Gomery's report and we are following through on his findings. Furthermore, we launched an inquiry on other issues raised by the Auditor General that go beyond the Gomery inquiry with the Paillé inquiry.

Mr. Gilles Dupeppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is reminding us that he hired Daniel Paillé to investigate polls commissioned by the federal government between 1990 and 2003. Yesterday the story was that 1995, 12 years ago, was too long ago. In my books, 1995 is not as long ago as 1990.

Oral Questions

Will the Prime Minister admit that when it is a Liberal scandal we absolutely must get to the bottom of things and when it is a federal scandal it needs to be stifled at all cost?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, everyone knows that it is not the intention of this government to protect the former Liberal government. However, the reality is that everything has been investigated or is currently being investigated and that this government abolished the Canadian Unity Council and Option Canada as soon as it came into power. This is a new government and a new era and the Bloc Québécois should stop living in the past.

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this sounds a lot like the former Liberal prime ministers.

Judge Grenier concluded his report with these words, “The evidence presented before me did not enable me to determine the funding source for the October 27 rally in downtown Montreal”.

Does it make sense to the Prime Minister that the funding source that paid for one of the federalist forces' biggest events, the Montreal love-in during the 1995 referendum, in violation of Quebec law, remains unknown?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister indicated, the Auditor General shed some light on this, and the former government launched an inquiry under Justice Gomery. Furthermore, our government appointed Mr. Paillé to investigate the polls and cast some light on that issue.

We believe that we have done everything that needs to be done with respect to this issue and that we can now move on. We will continue to deliver the goods for Quebec.

• (1430)

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, are we to understand that the Prime Minister is refusing to hold a public inquiry on actions taken during the Montreal love-in because it was not only the federal Liberals who violated the Referendum Act, but also the Conservatives and the New Democrats, who are all federalists?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can understand—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. I can see that there are a lot of discussions going on in the House, but they will have to wait until later because the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities is speaking. He has the floor.

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: Mr. Speaker, I understand that our Bloc Québécois friends are determined to keep bringing up the past.

This government is focused on the future. As we said yesterday and today, relationships between the provinces and territories and the federal government have never been as good as they are now.

Furthermore, we have settled a number of latent issues that we inherited from the former government. We are settling those issues.

MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canada has lost a quarter of a million jobs in the manufacturing industry. We are in a true crisis. Many well-paid jobs are disappearing every day. The gap between rich and poor is growing. We have no policy in place to counterbalance the rising dollar, which is negatively affecting our manufacturing industry. There is no policy in place to stop the fire sale of our economic jewels.

Why is the Prime Minister so eager to replace good jobs with McJobs?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, despite the difficulties seen in certain sectors, we currently have the lowest unemployment rate in nearly four decades. As for the manufacturing industry, this government provided major incentives in its recent budget. That budget was welcomed by the manufacturing industry. The New Democratic Party should stop obstructing the budget and the benefits it brings to that industry.

[English]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): The fact is, Mr. Speaker, we are losing 150 jobs in the manufacturing sector every single day. Yet we have no action on foreign takeovers, no action on the high dollar, no action on fair trade that would protect Canadian jobs, and no buy Canadian policy. There is no policy at all when it comes to our industry. That is just like the previous government.

We can understand the booing that went on today. The fact is that a quarter of a million workers have lost their jobs and across this country their families are in tears.

Why is the Prime Minister not listening to them instead of the boys on Bay Street? Where is the policy?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Once again, Mr. Speaker, despite those difficulties, the fact of the matter is that we do have a lot of job creation in this country and we do have the lowest unemployment rate in nearly four decades.

At the same time, we recognize the difficulty for the manufacturing sector. The budget contains important incentives for the manufacturing sector. The budget was extremely well received by the manufacturing sector. The NDP should stop blocking the budget and stop blocking those benefits for the manufacturing sector.

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CANADIAN FORCES

Mr. Paul Steckle (Huron—Bruce, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Monday of this week the Minister of National Defence, in response to a question regarding funeral expense compensation to the families of our fallen soldiers, replied that his department had paid the full costs for troops killed in Afghanistan.

Today the parents of Corporal Matthew Dinning went public with the truth on this matter.

Oral Questions

Will the minister today rise in his place and simply apologize to all affected families for his misrepresentation of the facts or will he continue to show contempt for such a personal and private matter?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think if you check the record, you will see that I did not say that they all got full compensation. I said that I directed that they all get full compensation. If there are any anomalies, the chief of defence staff is going to ensure that all families are contacted to make sure that everyone gets proper compensation.

• (1435)

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that minister can then produce the document proving that direction, here and now in this House of Commons.

The Dinning family is here today. However, the family should not have to come to Ottawa with cap in hand to look after something that our soldiers clearly deserve. Their son gave his life for this country. Paying for the funeral should have been very obvious.

However, the defence minister chose to mislead this House and today, at a hastily arranged press conference, he tried to cover up his incompetence and transfer the blame to DND officials.

Why do the Conservatives move to correct their bungling only when their incompetence and misleading statements finally catch up with them?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Once again, Mr. Speaker, no less an authority than the chief of defence staff has confirmed that these in fact are the government's instructions. They have been his instructions to the Department of National Defence.

At the same time, there have been payments made to this family. There also has been some discussion with this family, I understand, about what payments are reasonable. As I say, that is not an appropriate matter for the House of Commons. That can be resolved between officials and the family.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, consider this. The Dinning family, who are upright, honest people, lost a son in Afghanistan and are still deeply mourning their loss. A devoted mother is trying to come to terms with the pain and suffering caused by this tragedy. Yet these people are forced to drive eight hours to come here and put their private life on display, because their honour and integrity is being questioned, thanks to the Minister of National Defence, who also misled the House. Again this week, it appears that everything has been resolved to preserve the honour of the families of our troops.

I call on the Minister of National Defence to accept his responsibilities and immediately step down.

[*English*]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said, we look after families and we look after soldiers. It was my direction that all families get compensated fully for normal funeral expenses.

If, through some anomaly, some families did not get that compensation, the chief of defence staff will be ensuring that all families are contacted to ensure that they get their full compensation.

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is so easy to say that we are sorry. The family is here. It is the Prime Minister who should say to them that we are sorry.

This morning the Dinning family shared their sorrow and frustration with the inaction of the government in paying the funeral costs of their fallen son. They said they felt that the government had attacked their integrity and honour.

No family should go through this kind of indignity because of a government minister. The worst part was to see that minister play the blame game and orchestrate a very bad crisis management strategy at the last minute, almost as an afterthought. Enough is enough. We want the minister to resign immediately.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will say it again. We take the greatest care possible with soldiers and their families.

If there were some anomalies where some families did not get full compensation, we are going to be making sure that they do. I have asked the CDS to contact families to ensure that they get all the proper normal funeral and burial costs.

* * *

[*Translation*]

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in his latest report, the Information Commissioner was very critical of the government, and gave an F, a failing grade, to the Privy Council Office. The commissioner singled out the Prime Minister's Office in particular, which has received an F three years in a row, an example not to follow.

Will the Prime Minister, who has refused to clean up in the past, admit that he is trying to hide his current behaviour by doing everything he can to put off reforming the access to information regime?

[*English*]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is simply not the case. This government is completely committed to the Access to Information Act and the principles of openness and transparency.

I have to point out that the report indicates that, among others, Agriculture Canada, Citizenship and Immigration, Foreign Affairs, International Trade, Finance Canada, Fisheries and Oceans, and the Immigration and Refugee Board have all improved, and it goes on and on. A number of those have gone from an F to an A. We are on the right track.

• (1440)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government had promised to clean up the access to information regime.

Oral Questions

Does the Prime Minister realize that the commissioner's latest report confirms that, far from heading in the direction of more transparency, his office has taken to putting up more obstacles to the flow of information?

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I certainly cannot answer for what took place in the previous administration, but I am very pleased about the progress that this administration is making.

While I am on my feet, I would like to read what it had to say about Justice Canada:

There is reason to be optimistic that Justice Canada will succeed in improving its grade by next year. The department has put the necessary resources and processes in place, and senior management is closely monitoring progress.

I agree with that completely.

* * *

[Translation]

MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the crisis in the manufacturing sector is continuing. In the first four months of the year, 31,000 jobs disappeared in Quebec alone. The Minister of Industry is washing his hands of the whole issue and saying that he has already implemented the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology, which is not true.

Does the minister realize that in making such a statement, he is essentially confirming his customary laissez-faire policy, the preferred approach of his former employers at the Montreal Economic Institute?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government's approach is to help the industry. We are taking steps to help manufacturers, and our actions are in line with what the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology hoped to see us do for manufacturers. In fact, yesterday, Perrin Beatty had this to say about the government's response to the committee's unanimous report: "The government's response to the recommendations...show that it is listening to Canadian manufacturers, and delivering for them at a time when manufacturers need it most". The opposite is true of the Liberals and the NDP, who voted against the budget, against progressive measures for manufacturers.

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister should tell that to the workers who are unemployed.

The Minister of Industry is giving too much importance to the accelerated capital cost allowance, a tax measure that is inadequate because the manufacturing sector did not make a profit last year and therefore did not pay any tax.

Could the minister show a bit more initiative and also put in place budget measures to better target the sectors that are the worst off?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the measure my hon. colleague is referring to will cost taxpayers \$1.3 billion over three years. If she believes this is nothing, I suggest she take an economics course.

It is important to mention that the unemployment rate in Quebec decreased by 1.2% in April and is now at its lowest level ever. That is what Conservative measures have done.

* * *

[English]

CORPORATE TAKEOVERS

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Bombardier, with 56,000 employees, is a true Canadian success story. Its CEO, Laurent Beaudoin, issued a strong warning yesterday that the industry minister's laissez-faire approach to foreign takeovers is threatening Canadian jobs: "We can't continue to leave things as they are now, without somehow protecting Canadian interests".

Why is the industry minister ignoring industry leaders like Laurent Beaudoin while we lose tens of thousands of Canadian manufacturing jobs?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am surprised at that kind of question because the hon. member must know about the Investment Canada Act.

Under section 20 of the Investment Canada Act, when there is a foreign investment or a foreign takeover in this country, this is what we look at to be sure there are net benefits for Canadians: we look at the effect on economic activity, the effect on competition, the participation by Canadians, the effect on research and development, and also the effect on all the industrial base in this country.

Each time we have a foreign investment, it must be good for Canada.

* * *

MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the industry minister continues to ignore industry leaders like Laurent Beaudoin, Gord Nixon and Dominic D'Alessandro, business leaders who are responsible for thousands of Canadian jobs.

The finance minister, the trade minister and the industry minister have all said that they are concerned about the loss of jobs in the manufacturing sector.

If they are so concerned, why did they cancel labour market partnership agreements worth \$3.5 billion just when Canadian workers and manufacturers needed that help the most, when they are losing their manufacturing jobs?

● (1445)

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I just want to let the hon. member know what my colleague, the Minister of International Trade, said. He said that the policy the Liberals had before was knee-jerk politics of the worst kind. That is what he said.

Oral Questions

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are hundreds of workers on the Hill today. They are fighting for their jobs. They are fighting for a decent hearing and basic respect from the Conservative government. Textile workers in Quebec, automobile workers in Ontario, forestry and fishery workers, these people deserve answers from the government.

When will the Prime Minister take real action to protect these jobs?

[Translation]

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again I am surprised by the opposition's stand. The parliamentary committee, together with the government, unanimously adopted a report that made positive recommendations in keeping with the action requested by the manufacturing industry these past months. The government is taking action. Here, in the House, the opposition is being completely hypocritical and contrary by voting against the budget. What is the Liberal's true position? What is the NDP's true position? Are they for or against manufacturers?

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister always seems surprised by the questions he is asked.

The government is taking its time with Bill C-55, a bill adopted by the last Parliament. This bill gave us the wage earner protection program to help protect the salaries and pensions of workers in the event of bankruptcy. Because of the multitude of job losses, many families will need this legislation.

Will the Prime Minister finally promise to finalize this bill before the end of this session?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we tabled this bill several months ago. A notice of motion was given to the House. All the opposition parties agreed to fast track it and send it directly to the Senate since the technical changes reflected the will of the House of Commons in the last Parliament. However, the Bloc Québécois made amendments and these are not in the spirit of the bill that was passed. When the Bloc gives us the green light, we will act quickly and table the bill.

* * *

[English]

ESTONIA

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and International Trade.

Estonia and other Baltic States have long been supported by Conservative governments in Canada. When they achieved restored freedom, a Canadian Conservative government was among the first in the world to recognize their restored independence.

In recent weeks, following an Estonian decision to relocate a Soviet occupation era war memorial, Estonia has been the victim of ethnic clashes, cyber attacks and assaults on Estonian diplomats in Russia as the Russian government has stepped up the rhetorical attacks on Estonia.

Is Canada standing up for the freedom and democracy of our NATO ally, Estonia?

Hon. Helena Guergis (Secretary of State (Foreign Affairs and International Trade) (Sport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada stands strongly by Estonia, a NATO ally and friend of Canada, in the face of intimidation from Russia or any other country. During the height of the tensions over this incident, our foreign affairs minister communicated to Russia in the strongest terms our concerns over the Russians' actions and reminded them of their obligations under international law.

Whether the acts against Estonia are in cyberspace or in the streets of Moscow or Tallinn, Canada will continue to support the government and people of Estonia in the face of any aggressive act.

I might add that Estonia is a responsible global citizen, including the deployment of forces to southern Afghanistan.

* * *

MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government has failed Canadians and working class families across this country. It has failed to invest in technology for a green auto strategy. It has failed to produce an auto plan. It has failed to stop a single plant closure across this country. Jobs are outsourced, there are foreign takeovers, factories are moving to Mexico, and still there is no plan.

How many more working families have to suffer before somebody over there gives a damn and does something about it?

The Speaker: The hon. member for Windsor West will want to use judicial restraint in his questions and use of language.

The hon. Minister of Industry was rising to answer the question.

● (1450)

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is always big rhetoric from the opposition members. Do you know why? Because they vote against the budget. They vote against what is good for the manufacturers. They vote against a strong economic union in this country.

Mr. Speaker, do you know what Mr. Perrin Beatty said yesterday? He said that the government's response to the recommendations shows that it is listening. We are listening to Canadian manufacturers and delivering for them at a time when manufacturers need it most.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it would be irresponsible for the minister to say that he adopted the recommendations. He did not even get past recommendation one of the industry committee report. As for rhetoric, about 150 families will go home tonight, people who do not have a job and a paycheque for the next week. There is no rhetoric about that.

Oral Questions

Part of the problem is the government continues with the policies of the previous one. Right now the government is more interested in South Korea shipping cars into Canada than Canada having the same treatment.

Why is it going to protect jobs in South Korea as opposed to growing them in southwestern Ontario? Stand up for Canada for a change. Do something different.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The Minister of Industry has the floor and we have to be able to hear his answer. I can tell everyone wants to listen. The Minister of Industry has the floor.

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is very simple. Since we took office in January 2006, employment increased by 2.8% in this country. This is because we have a budget that is listening to entrepreneurs in this country, is listening to manufacturers. We are listening to Canadians.

We lowered taxes. That is good for the economy. People have more money in their pockets. They can invest. They can create jobs. That is what is important in this country.

* * *

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first the Conservatives broke their promise to reform the Access to Information Act. Then when they tabled their discussion paper, the former information commissioner said it would make government less transparent, not more. Now, when the new commissioner calls the Prime Minister's own department, the Privy Council Office, the worst access to information offender, something is wrong.

Will the Prime Minister admit that he runs the most secretive government this country has ever seen?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is absolutely a bunch of nonsense.

My colleague, the President of the Treasury Board, introduced the Federal Accountability Act to open up access and bring back accountability.

Quite frankly, I am pleased with the report. When we look at the report we see progress that is being made, quite frankly finally progress is being made in this area, progress that was never made under the former administration.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Information Commissioner was quite clear in his most recent report.

He singles out the Privy Council Office, the Prime Minister's own department, as one of the government's least transparent institutions. Instead of showing leadership, the Prime Minister is setting a bad example.

It is one thing for him to want to have complete control over his cabinet and even journalists, but for him to also try to hide information from the public is unacceptable.

Why does the Prime Minister not only want to control information, but also hide it from the public?

[*English*]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government has been completely accountable through its legislation and through its actions.

I can tell the House who does not want to open up access and that is the Liberal Party. When we wanted to open up the Wheat Board, who was it that stood against it? It was the Liberal Party of Canada. The Liberals should be ashamed of themselves.

* * *

RCMP

Hon. Sue Barnes (London West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a dozen uniformed RCMP officers alleging harassment, political spying and even worse have come forward asking for protection and a public inquiry to air their claims. The Conservative public safety minister's response is to shrug his shoulders, plug his ears and see no evil, hear no evil.

Is this wilful blindness or gross negligence? When it comes to protecting the integrity of Canada's national police, why is the public safety minister thwarting real action?

• (1455)

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, not only are we the only ones who are taking action to get to the bottom of some of the concerns that have been raised, and we are doing that through outright investigation, we are also the only ones who actually stand up for the integrity of the RCMP and regularly report on the good things that they do from coast to coast.

I can also add that not long ago I communicated with some officers who had some information they wanted to bring forward. I verified to them that anything they bring forward would be looked at in all sincerity and that no officers would ever be held in contempt or in any way dealt with negatively because they were bringing forward bona fide information. I have communicated that.

Hon. Sue Barnes (London West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, RCMP officers told the committee yesterday how the pension scandal investigation was suppressed and dismantled by senior RCMP management.

Why is the public safety minister so determined to subvert the investigation of this alleged abuse? Why not do the obvious, what every expert knows is necessary, and call a full judicial inquiry?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I always appreciate courage at any time, especially someone who can stand up as a member of the former regime when it had evidence that this pension problem was unfolding and it did nothing. In fact, we were told by officers that my predecessor, the former minister, was given the information and did not even talk to the commissioner about it.

I admire her courage in standing up in the face of absolute inaction by her party. I would appreciate a little admiration from her for what our party is doing to get to the bottom of this.

* * *

[Translation]

FESTIVALS AND SPECIAL EVENTS

Mr. Maka Kotto (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women has refused the unanimous request of the National Assembly of Quebec to transfer funding for festivals. The minister said she wants to support small cultural events and not just big ones. However, the smallest-scale cultural events are the ones that are in desperate need of money.

When will the minister realize that her bungling is harmful to all the communities? Will she finally listen to reason and immediately transfer the proper share of the new funding to Quebec so that it can be distributed as soon as possible?

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, this is new funding for a new program. This is not a transfer to the provinces. The new program will help small and medium size events, not just the major festivals. The program will be in place at the end of the summer.

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Mr. Speaker, does the minister realize that her refusal to provide funding has already been harmful? In the Magdalen Islands, the Rendez-vous Aventure Festival, which has been around for seven years, lost its licence because it did not have enough funding. Major economic spinoffs from this festival, including a world cup event, are disappearing, not to mention dozens of jobs.

Will the minister take action or wait for hundreds of events to be cancelled, thereby denying regional communities such important summer jobs and economic spinoffs?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Economic Development Agency of Canada is a partner of the festivals not just in the greater Montreal area, but throughout Quebec. Furthermore, we have maintained our criteria both for marketing and for product renewal. Last year, the festival the hon. member is referring to received a \$180,000 contribution for renewing their product.

However, this year, since it is a matter of marketing, we are maintaining our level of funding for marketing their festival.

* * *

[English]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Hon. Raymond Simard (Saint Boniface, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the U.S. is planning to channel overflow waters from Devils Lake in North Dakota into Lake Winnipeg in Manitoba. The previous Liberal government had an agreement with the U.S. that a filter would be installed to ensure invasive alien species would not be introduced into the Lake Winnipeg watershed.

Oral Questions

Has the government ensured that this filter has been installed, and is there any evidence of alien species being found in the Lake Winnipeg watershed?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is not quite as our colleague opposite has suggested. Unfortunately, this is another problem that we inherited from the Liberal government.

We are working very closely with Premier Gary Doer. I have taken this issue directly to the head of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and directly to senior officials in the administration south of the border.

Working constructively and collectively with Manitoba, we believe we can ensure the environmental protection of this important part of our country.

* * *

● (1500)

SENATE TENURE LEGISLATION

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government introduced Bill S-4, the bill to limit the terms of senators, because we firmly believe the Senate must change. It is unacceptable that in the year 2007, 140 years after Confederation, unelected and unaccountable senators can serve up to 45 years. Can members believe that? Yet it appears that the Liberal Senate refuses to act, refuses to accept change, refuses to be held accountable.

Could the Minister for Democratic Reform tell the House of the status of this important democratic reform?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Senate must change. Today, incredibly, marks the first birthday of a bill to limit the terms of senators. For a full year and counting, the Liberal Senate has refused to act and the Liberal Party refuses to change. They continue to put entitlements for a privileged few and have good government for all.

This, despite a Liberal leader who heroically claims he supports term limits and even declared back in February that he had used his influence to set his senators straight and the bill would pass, but they simply refuse to act. They refuse to listen to their own leader. He is notaleader.ca.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. Question period is for questions and answers, not for singing.

*Oral Questions***HEALTH**

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, behind the numbers that make up the manufacturing job crisis in the country, there are real families who find it impossible to make ends meet. When a job disappears, the whole family loses the economic security that comes not only with an income, but with the benefits as well. With each of the 250,000 manufacturing job losses, an entire family loses its prescription drug coverage. This is not right.

When will the government take the first step to introduce universal drug coverage and protect working families in Canada?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government is moving forward with our dialogue with provinces and territories. When it comes to the national pharmaceutical strategy, we have made great gains in terms of researching this issue and finding areas of possible agreement.

Through increases to transfers to provinces this year alone of \$1.2 billion in program transfers just to health care, plus an extra \$1 billion on top of that for patient wait times guarantees and through Canada Health Infoway, the government is getting the job done.

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, each day the country loses 150 good paying manufacturing jobs. That is 150 families each day who lose their income and their drug coverage.

While working and middle class families continue to get squeezed through the jobs crisis, big pharmaceutical companies are making off with record profits.

When will the government start standing up for working families and not the drug giants, and take action on universal drug coverage to all Canadians?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government believes in the right to health care. It believes it should be properly funded.

After 13 years of Liberal rule where wait times doubled, we are actually reducing wait times, with the cooperation of the provinces and territories.

Those are the facts on the floor. We are for hard-working Canadian families and we are ensuring we put health care first.

* * *

AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday in the foreign affairs committee we heard shocking expert testimony about the failures of the government dealing with aid in Afghanistan.

The CIDA minister is bungling Canadian initiatives in development abroad by not delivering the proper aid. Her pitiful response yesterday was an embarrassment to Canadians and to our troops.

When will the Prime Minister show some real progress and real development instead of partisan photo ops?

[Translation]

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of International Cooperation and Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the real bungling is on the other side of the House.

With respect to development in Afghanistan, let us recall the position of the previous Liberal government, which approved only dwindling sums for Afghanistan. We increased the budgets. We delivered the goods. We are continuing to work very hard in Afghanistan, particularly in Kandahar, as all our partners in Kandahar can confirm.

* * *

• (1505)

[English]

MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my constituents know first-hand the manufacturing sector is facing a difficult transition period. Working families in Essex-Windsor are living through job losses. They are deeply concerned about the future of this sector. Apparently the opposition is not concerned about it.

In budget 2007, Canada's Conservative government took real and significant action to help maintain a strong manufacturing sector in Canada.

Could the Minister of Finance tell the opposition and the rest of the House why these measures are so vital to working families in Essex and across Canada, and a strong manufacturing sector?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Since the government was elected, Mr. Speaker, there are more than 450,000 new jobs in Canada and 70% of them are full time jobs. In fact, in various parts of Canada we have labour shortages.

However, there are some challenges, particularly in the manufacturing sector, so we did something about it. In budget 2007 we increased the capital cost allowance rate for machinery and equipment to 50% and permitted it to be claimed over two years only. That is 100%.

We are doing something about it. The Liberals and the NDP—

The Speaker: Order, please. That will conclude question period for today.

I believe the chief government whip is rising on a point of order.

Hon. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, I think if you were to seek it, you would find unanimous consent to proceed immediately to the deferred recorded divisions that are scheduled for later today.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to proceed in this way?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

FISHERIES ACT, 2007

The House resumed from May 29 consideration of the motion that Bill C-45, An Act respecting the sustainable development of Canada's seacoast and inland fisheries, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the amendment of the member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor on the motion at second reading stage of Bill C-45.

Call in the members.

• (1515)

[Translation]

(The House divided on the amendment, which was negated on the following division:)

(Division No. 192)

YEAS

Members

Alghabra	Angus
Atamanenko	Bagnell
Bains	Barnes
Bélanger	Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Bell (North Vancouver)	Bennett
Bevington	Black
Blaikie	Bonin
Boshcoff	Brison
Brown (Oakville)	Byrne
Cannis	Chan
Charlton	Chow
Christopherson	Coderre
Comartin	Cotler
Crowder	Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
Cullen (Etobicoke North)	Cuzner
D'Amours	Dewar
Dhaliwal	Dhalla
Dosanjh	Dryden
Easter	Eyking
Folco	Godfrey
Godin	Goodale
Graham	Guarnieri
Holland	Hubbard
Jennings	Julian
Kadis	Karetak-Lindell
Karygiannis	Keeper
Layton	LeBlanc
Lee	MacAulay
Malhi	Maloney
Marleau	Marston
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Masse	Mathysen
Matthews	McCallum
McGuinty	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
McTeague	Merasty
Minna	Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Murphy (Charlottetown)	Nash
Neville	Owen
Pacetti	Patry
Pearson	Peterson
Priddy	Proulx
Ratansi	Redman
Regan	Robillard
Rodriguez	Rota
Russell	Savage
Savoie	Scarpaleggia
Scott	Siksay
Silva	Simard
St. Denis	Steckle

Stoffer
Telegdi
Thibault (West Nova)
Valley
Wappel
Wilfert
Zed- — 111

Abbott
Albrecht
Allison
Anders
André
Asselin
Baird
Batters
Benoit
Bezan
Blackburn
Blaney
Bouchard
Bourgeois
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Bruinooge
Calkins
Cannon (Pontiac)
Carrier
Casson
Clement
Crête
Day
Del Mastro
Deschamps
Doyle
Dykstra
Epp
Fast
Fitzpatrick
Fletcher
Gagnon
Gaudet
Goodyear
Guay
Guimond
Harris
Hawn
Hiebert
Hinton
Jean
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Khan
Kotto
Laforest
Lake
Lauzon
Lemieux
Lévesque
Lunn
Lussier
Malo
Mayes
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
Merrifield
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Mourani
Nicholson
O'Connor
Oda
Pallister
Paradis
Petit
Plamondon
Prentice
Rajotte
Richardson
Roy
Schellenberger
Skelton
Solberg

Government Orders

Szabo
Temelkovski
Tonks
Volpe
Wasylycia-Leis
Wrzesnewskyj

NAYS

Members

Ablonczy
Allen
Ambrose
Anderson
Arthur
Bachand
Barbot
Bellavance
Bernier
Bigras
Blais
Bonsant
Boucher
Breitkreuz
Brown (Barrie)
Brunelle
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Carrie
Casey
Chong
Comuzzi
Davidson
DeBellefeuille
Demers
Devolin
Duceppe
Emerson
Faille
Finley
Flaherty
Freeman
Gallant
Gauthier
Grewal
Guergis
Hanger
Harvey
Heam
Hill
Jaffer
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Laframboise
Lalonde
Lemay
Lessard
Lukiwski
Lunney
MacKenzie
Manning
Ménard (Hochelaga)
Menzies
Miller
Nadeau
Norlock
Obhrai
Ouellet
Paquette
Perron
Picard
Poilievre
Preston
Reid
Ritz
Scheer
Shipley
Smith
Sorenson

Private Members' Business

St-Cyr	St-Hilaire
Stanton	Storseth
Strahl	Sweet
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)	
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)	
Thompson (Wild Rose)	Tilson
Toews	Tweed
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vellacott	Verner
Wallace	Warawa
Warkentin	Watson
Williams	Yelich— 164

PAIRED

Members

Cardin	Cummins
Galipeau	Gravel
Lavallée	MacKay (Central Nova)
Mark	Vincent— 8

The Speaker: I declare the amendment lost.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE PROTECTION ACT

The House resumed from May 28 consideration of the motion that Bill C-280, An Act to Amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (coming into force of sections 110, 111 and 171), be read the third time and passed.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at third reading stage of Bill C-280 under private members' business.

• (1525)

[*Translation*]

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

(*Division No. 193*)

YEAS

Members

Alghabra	André
Angus	Asselin
Atamanenko	Bachand
Bagnell	Bains
Barbot	Barnes
Bélangier	Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Bell (North Vancouver)	Bellavance
Bennett	Bevington
Bigras	Black
Blaikie	Blais
Bonin	Bonsant
Boshcoff	Bouchard
Bourgeois	Brisson
Brown (Oakville)	Brunelle
Byrne	Cannis
Carrier	Chan
Charlton	Chow
Christopherson	Comartin
Cotler	Crête
Crowder	Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
Cuzner	D'Amours
DeBellefeuille	Demers
Deschamps	Dewar
Dhaliwal	Dhalla
Dosanjh	Dryden
Duceppe	Easter
Eyking	Faille

Folco	Freeman
Gagnon	Gaudet
Gauthier	Godfrey
Godin	Goodale
Graham	Guay
Guimond	Holland
Hubbard	Jennings
Julian	Kadis
Karetak-Lindell	Karygiannis
Keeper	Kotto
Laforest	Laframboise
Lalonde	Layton
LeBlanc	Lemay
Lessard	Lévesque
Lussier	MacAulay
Malhi	Malo
Maloney	Marleau
Marston	Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)	Masse
Mathysen	Matthews
McCallum	McGuinty
McTeague	Ménard (Hochelaga)
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)	Merasty
Minna	Mourani
Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)	Murphy (Charlottetown)
Nadeau	Nash
Neville	Ouellet
Owen	Pacetti
Paquette	Patry
Pearson	Perron
Peterson	Picard
Plamondon	Priddy
Proulx	Ratansi
Redman	Regan
Robillard	Rodriguez
Rota	Roy
Russell	Savage
Savoie	Scarpaleggia
Scott	Siksay
Silva	Simard
St-Cyr	St-Hilaire
St. Denis	Steckle
Stoffer	Szabo
Telegdi	Temelkovski
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)	
Thibault (West Nova)	
Tonks	Valley
Wappel	Wasylycia-Leis
Wilfert	Wrzesnewskyj
Zed— 151	

NAYS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Albrecht	Allen
Allison	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Arthur	Baird
Batters	Benoit
Bernier	Bezan
Blackburn	Blaney
Boucher	Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinoooge	Calkins
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)	Cannon (Pontiac)
Carrie	Casey
Chong	Clement
Comuzzi	Davidson
Day	Del Mastro
Devolin	Doyle
Dykstra	Emerson
Epp	Fast
Finley	Fitzpatrick
Flaherty	Fletcher
Gallant	Goodyear
Grewal	Guergis
Hanger	Harris
Harvey	Hawn
Hearn	Hiebert
Hill	Hinton
Jaffer	Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)

Routine Proceedings

Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Khan
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lake	Lauzon
Lee	Lemieux
Lukiwski	Lunn
Lunney	MacKenzie
Manning	Mayes
Menzies	Merrifield
Miller	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Nicholson
Norlock	O'Connor
Obhrai	Oda
Pallister	Paradis
Petit	Poilievre
Prentice	Preston
Rajotte	Reid
Richardson	Ritz
Scheer	Schellenberger
Shiple	Skelton
Smith	Solberg
Sorenson	Stanton
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Thompson (Wild Rose)	Tilson
Toews	Tweed
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vellacott	Verner
Volpe	Wallace
Warawa	Warkentin
Watson	Williams
Yelich — 119	

PAIRED

Members

Cardin	Cummins
Galipeau	Gravel
Lavallée	MacKay (Central Nova)
Mark	Vincent — 8

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

(Bill read the third time and passed)

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1530)

[*English*]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to eight petitions.

* * *

[*Translation*]

CANADA TRANSPORTATION ACT

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-58, An Act to amend the Canada Transportation Act (railway transportation).

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

[*English*]

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. Tom Wappel (Scarborough Southwest, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of Canadian delegation of the Canada-China Legislative Association respecting its visit to Shanghai, Chengdu and Beijing, China from March 12 to March 16, 2007.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND ESTIMATES

Mr. Norman Doyle (St. John's East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 16th report of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates on the main estimates ending March 31, 2008.

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Norman Doyle (St. John's East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 15th report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration entitled, "Safeguarding Asylum — Sustaining Canada's Commitments to Refugees".

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 20th report related to the nomination of Mr. Timothy Wilson Casgrain to the position of chairperson of the board of directors of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

[*Translation*]

LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE FOR BILL C-35

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the legislative committee responsible for Bill C-35. In accordance with its order of reference of Tuesday, March 26, 2007, your committee has considered Bill C-35, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (reverse onus in bail hearings for firearm-related offences), and agreed, on Tuesday, May 29, 2007, to report it without amendment.

[*English*]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS AND NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Colin Mayes (Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the eighth report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development regarding the main estimates for the fiscal year of 2007-08. The committee has considered all the votes under Indian and Northern Affairs Canada and reports the same.

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 51st report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding Bill C-415.

Routine Proceedings

Pursuant to Standing Order 92(3)(b) the committee hereby reports that it does not concur in the second report of the subcommittee on private members' business and is of the opinion that Bill C-415, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code (replacement workers), should remain votable.

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 92(3)(b) the report is deemed adopted.

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 52nd 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 52nd report later this day.

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 20th report of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women entitled, "Human Trafficking and the 2010 Olympics", asking the government to develop and implement a plan prior to the 2010 Olympics to curtail the trafficking of women and girls for sexual purposes.

* * *

• (1535)

MAIN ESTIMATES 2007-08—ENVIRONMENT

The Speaker: The following motion in the name of the hon. Leader of the Opposition is deemed adopted.

[*Translation*]

That, pursuant to Standing Order 81(4)(b), consideration by the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development of Votes 1, 5 and 10 under ENVIRONMENT—Department, in the Main Estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008, be extended beyond May 31, 2007.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

[*English*]

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 52nd report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs concerning the membership of committees of the House presented to the House earlier this day be concurred in.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Cambridge have the unanimous consent of the House to propose the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*Translation*]

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

(Motion agreed to)

[*English*]

PETITIONS

FOREIGN DOCTORS

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present today.

The first petition is on behalf of the people of Two Hills and area, with hundreds of signatures, asking for the assistance of their MP and the neighbouring MP to get doctors through the immigration system. The petitioners ask for the system to be improved to help foreign doctors come into rural areas.

The signatures on this petition were collected before certain changes were made which have dealt with a large part of the problem.

JUSTICE

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the second petition the petitioners point to the case of Shane Rolston who was murdered. They call upon the Government of Canada to put in place legislation which more adequately deals with crimes such as this and that the sentence match the crime committed, regardless of age, class or race.

I am pleased to present this petition, again with hundreds of signatures, on behalf of the people of my constituency and area.

NON-SMOKERS' HEALTH ACT

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present a series of petitions initiated by people across Ontario which ask Parliament to immediately amend the Non-smokers' Health Act to prohibit indoor designated smoking rooms in all federal workplaces and workplaces that are federally regulated.

In regard to evidence that concluded that tobacco smoke does in fact create health hazards and since indoor smoking facilities do not adequately protect against these hazards, the amended Non-smokers' Health Act would help make Canada a healthier place to live by protecting all citizens from second-hand smoke.

I also want to thank Minister Jim Watson, the Ontario Minister of Health Promotion, who has done a lot of work to organize and start this petition. Liberals are proud to be working together to make Ontario a healthier place.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a series of petitions signed by concerned people who are calling upon Parliament to act against the political killing in the Philippines. The petitioners state that the Government of the Philippines is in clear violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, that everyone has a right to life, liberty and security of the person.

The Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives, KAIROS, has demanded that Parliament conduct investigations on the killing to determine what we should do in response to these blatant human rights violations.

Routine Proceedings

HEALTH

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have another petition signed by concerned citizens of our country calling upon Parliament to protect the health of its citizens by acting to ban the sale of all smokeless tobacco products.

[*Translation*]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure of tabling three petitions, for a total of 840 signatures from Quebec, Ontario and Prince Edward Island.

These petitions ask the government to criticize the serious deterioration of human rights in the Philippines and to put pressure on the Philippine government.

Other colleagues want to table similar petitions. It is important to note that the purpose of these petitions is to force the Philippine government to stop kidnappings and extrajudicial murders, which prevent the opposition from doing its democratic work.

• (1540)

[*English*]

MINIMUM WAGE LEGISLATION

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present a petition to the House signed by close to 100 people from the wonderful province of Alberta.

The petitioners are asking the government to move on a bill put forward by the member for Parkdale—High Park to reinstate a federal minimum wage of \$10 an hour. They note in the preamble that the federal minimum wage was eliminated in 1996 by the then Liberal government. The petitioners feel that this would be a move in the right direction to give those who work in our country at least a wage that would get them to a place where their nose is just above the poverty line.

The petitioners are not suggesting for a second that this is the be all to end all, but it certainly would set a target that others could aspire to in terms of best practice for labour standards across the country and a minimum wage.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I stand before the House today to present a petition calling upon the Canadian government to take action and to condemn the political killings that are taking place in the Philippines. Since 2001, over 850 individuals, activists, human rights workers, lawyers and church organizers, have been killed.

Canada has been giving over \$25 million of aid. There is over \$1.5 billion in a bilateral trade relationship between Canada and the Philippines.

The individuals who have signed this petition are requesting the Canadian government to ensure that our support and assistance is linked to some tangible actions to ensure that there is an end to these political killings. Canada has always been the champion of human rights, democracy and freedom, and it is imperative that we all act unanimously to ensure that there is an end to these atrocities that are occurring.

I have signatures of thousands of Canadians across this country. I hope this will encourage the government to take immediate action to once again end the human rights violations in the Philippines.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of thousands of Canadians who call upon the government to deal with the crisis in the Philippines.

The petitioners note that since 2001 there have been over 750 reported cases of politically motivated killings. They want our Parliament to conduct hearings on this. They want us to deal with the issue of mining companies that are complicit in this.

The petitioners call upon the Canadian government to immediately deal with this issue because it has been going on for too long.

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present these petitions assembled by the hard work of various churches, community organizations, and human rights groups in my riding and across Canada that seek the assistance of the Canadian Parliament to end the tragic, politically motivated killings that are directed at social and human rights activists, journalists, church workers, indigent people and other innocent parties in the Philippines. Observers have noticed an alarming spike in these killings since 2001, coupled with a disturbing trend of inadequate investigation by the Government of the Philippines.

Any culture of impunity encourages further criminal conduct and the absence of accountability. The protection of human rights around the world is a core value of Canada and of our humanitarian foreign policy.

The petitions call upon the Government of Canada and the Canadian Parliament to take a leading role in the protection and support of the innocent.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Hon. Roy Cullen (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure to present a petition signed by close to 300 Canadians from Halifax to St. John's, Saint-Eustache, Vancouver, Thunder Bay and Toronto which calls upon the government to make a permanent, long term commitment to the super flow-through share program.

In Canada, our reserves of metals and minerals are declining. These incentives are needed to encourage exploration and retain and enhance jobs in these communities across Canada.

[*Translation*]

GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS

Mr. Marcel Lussier (Brossard—La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour of tabling in this House a petition against GMOs, with close to 2,000 names collected by grade five students, under the supervision of their teacher, Marie-Ève Houle, at the Notre-Dame-Saint-Joseph de La Prairie school.

In addition, Thomas Drolet and James Cameron created a website. The petition can be signed electronically at www.contreogm.piczo.com.

Routine Proceedings

In light of some alarming health information, the petitioners are calling on Parliament to make labelling mandatory on all products for human and animal consumption that contain GMOs.

• (1545)

[*English*]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition on behalf of over 200 of my constituents who are concerned about the reported killings in the Philippines.

The petitioners are calling on Parliament to have the Subcommittee on International Human Rights conduct a hearing on these political killings and to include an investigation into the risk for Canadian mining companies operating in the Philippines of becoming complicit in these political killings.

They also ask that we consider sending a joint delegation to the Philippines to convey the concerns of Canadians and, finally, to ask the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of International Trade, and the Canadian mission at the United Nations to call for an investigation into the political killings in the Philippines by the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary and arbitrary executions.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, like many of my colleagues here today I am rising to present a petition dealing with the extrajudicial killings in the Philippines and I am proud to do so in the presence of the Reverend Shaun Fryday of the Beaconsfield United Church in my riding who was active in putting together this petition.

I would also like to mention that it had been hoped that my colleague from Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine would have been able to present some of these petitions, but they were certified as a block so she could not do so even though she had hoped to.

As my colleagues mentioned, this petition asks that the Subcommittee on International Human Rights hold hearings into extrajudicial killings in the Philippines and that the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of International Trade, and the Canadian mission at the United Nations call for an investigation into the political killings in the Philippines by the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary and arbitrary executions.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from hundreds of Canadians across Canada. They are concerned that Canada has not publicly condemned the killings nor raised this critical human rights issue concerning the violation of people's rights in the Philippines in its annual report and statements at the United Nations.

Canadian mining companies operating in the Philippines risk becoming complicit in the political killings and other forms of human rights abuses.

The petitioners have noted that since 2001 there have been over 750 reported cases of politically motivated killings in the Philippines and to this day the killing continues.

The petitioners call on Parliament to send a joint delegation of parliamentarians and representatives of Canadian non-governmental organizations to the Philippines immediately and to ask the Minister

of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of International Trade and the Canadian mission at the United Nations to call for an investigation into the political killings in the Philippines.

They also call on Parliament to conduct a hearing on the political killings in the Philippines by the Subcommittee on International Human Rights, including an investigation into the risk of Canadian mining companies operating in the Philippines, and Canada's cooperation with the Philippines government on trade, investment and the fight against terrorism and its impact on human rights. The killing must stop now and the now is the to take action.

INCOME TRUSTS

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I present this income trust broken promise petition on behalf of Dr. Boyd Upper from Ontario who remembers the Prime Minister boasting about his apparent commitment to accountability when he said, "the greatest fraud is a promise not kept".

The petitioners remind the Prime Minister that he promised never to tax income trusts, but he recklessly broke that promise by imposing a 31.5% punitive tax which permanently wiped out over \$25 billion of hard-earned retirement savings of over two million Canadians, particularly seniors.

The petitioners therefore call upon the Conservative minority government, first, to admit that the decision to tax income trusts was based on flawed methodology and incorrect assumptions; second, to apologize to those who were unfairly harmed by this broken promise; and, finally, to repeal the punitive 31.5% tax on income trusts.

• (1550)

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to join other members of this House to present the wish of over 5,000 Canadians that this Parliament do what it can, be it through committee study or sending an official delegation to the United Nations, to end the political killings in the Philippines.

In just over five years, as members have heard, 750 people have been killed in politically motivated killings in the Philippines.

As parliamentarians, we must do all in our power to ensure that freedom of speech and democracy is respected in the Philippines as in all countries.

* * *

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 wish to inform the House that Question No. 203 will be answered today.

[Text]

Question No. 203—**Ms. Alexa McDonough:**

With respect to the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC): (a) what is the government's current policy towards ECOSOC; and (b) is the government planning a change in its policy towards ECOSOC and, if so, what are the changes being considered?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in response to (a), Canada is currently a member of the United Nations Economic and Social Council, ECOSOC, and the government is fully supportive of its important function in the UN system and engaged in its work, in many instances in cooperation with our provincial and civil society partners. ECOSOC has a broad and complex mandate which has been substantially affected by increasing globalization. In the UN charter, ECOSOC is given responsibility for the UN's economic, social and cultural work, and the complex of subsidiary bodies created by ECOSOC have become the fora for primary detailed discussion of these issues, as well as many issues related to the environment. It is the parent body of the UN's functional commissions and a number of committees and expert bodies which, along with the specialized agencies, report to ECOSOC. Other questions which have no other clear institutional home in the system, such as financing for development, are dealt with first by ECOSOC. ECOSOC is also tasked with follow-up to the UN's major summits and conferences. Last year ECOSOC adopted 49 resolutions and 74 decisions on a diverse range of issues, including economic development, rural development and hunger, the next financing for development conference, implementation of the decisions of the World Summit on the Information Society, humanitarian assistance, rule of law and criminal justice in Africa, several issues related to women and girls, drug control strategies for Afghanistan, assistance to the Palestinians. ECOSOC therefore plays a vital role, in particular as the sole UN body which brings together government representatives and civil society. ECOSOC is the focus for debate on a wide range of critical issues of concern to the international community, including Canadians. Canada has also been active in efforts to ensure ECOSOC's continued relevance and authority through reform and modernization of its working methods and structure.

In response to (b), there is no change planned in the government's policy toward ECOSOC.

* * *

[English]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if Question No. 192 could be made an order for return, this return would be tabled immediately.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 192—**Ms. Olivia Chow:**

With regard to the government's initiatives to support families: (a) how many Canadian families earning an annual income of less than \$20,000 a year will not be

Routine Proceedings

eligible for the new Child Tax Credit; (b) what does the government plan to do to stop the clawback of the national child tax benefit by the provinces; and (c) what additional measures will the government initiate to help eliminate child poverty?

(Return tabled)

[English]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I ask that all remaining questions be allowed to stand

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): 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, Notices of Motion for the Production of Papers Nos. P-13, P-14, P-15, P-16, P-17, P-18 and P-19 in the name of the hon. member for Delta—Richmond East are acceptable to the government and the documents are tabled immediately.

Motion P-13

That a humble Address be presented to Her Excellency praying that she will cause to be laid before the House a copy of the Tsawwassen First Nation Own Source Revenue Agreement, a side agreement to the Tsawwassen Final Agreement between the Tsawwassen Indian Band, Canada and British Columbia.

Motion P-14

That a humble Address be presented to Her Excellency praying that she will cause to be laid before this House a copy of the Tsawwassen First Nation Tax Treatment Agreement, a side agreement to the Tsawwassen Final Agreement between the Tsawwassen Indian Band, Canada and British Columbia.

Motion P-15

That a humble Address be presented to Her Excellency praying that she will cause to be laid before this House a copy of the Tsawwassen First Nation Implementation Plan, a side agreement to the Tsawwassen Final Agreement between the Tsawwassen Indian Band, Canada and British Columbia.

Motion P-16

That a humble Address be presented to Her Excellency praying that she will cause to be laid before this House a copy of the Tsawwassen First Nation Real Property Tax Coordination Agreement, a side agreement to the Tsawwassen Final Agreement between the Tsawwassen Indian Band, Canada and British Columbia.

Motion P-17

That a humble Address be presented to Her Excellency praying that she will cause to be laid before the House a copy of the Tsawwassen First Nation Fiscal Financing Agreement, a side agreement to the Tsawwassen Final Agreement between the Tsawwassen Indian Band, Canada and British Columbia.

Motion P-18

That a humble Address be presented to Her Excellency praying that she will cause to be laid before the House a copy of the Tsawwassen First Nation Fisheries Operational Guidelines, a side agreement to the Tsawwassen Final Agreement between the Tsawwassen Indian Band, Canada and British Columbia.

Motion P-19

That a humble Address be presented to Her Excellency praying that she will cause to be laid before this House a copy of the Tsawwassen First Nation Harvest Agreement, a side agreement to the Tsawwassen Final Agreement between the Tsawwassen Indian Band, Canada and British Columbia.

(Motions agreed to)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I ask that all other notices of motions for the production of papers be allowed to stand.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Is that agreed?

Government Orders

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC) moved that Bill C-55, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act (expanded voting opportunities) and to make a consequential amendment to the Referendum Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to open debate today on the expanded voting opportunities bill.

The right to vote is our most precious and fundamental right. Each year about 150,000 people become new Canadian citizens. Most have come to our nation in search of freedom and they find that when they achieve Canadian citizenship, the right to vote, among the many rights and privileges they are conferred, is the most treasured privilege and duty that they do acquire.

•(1555)

[Translation]

Public participation in the political process, by exercising one's right to vote, is the cornerstone of our democracy. Voting validates the position of a responsible and accountable government. Of all forms of civic engagement, voting is perhaps the simplest and most important. By deciding to vote, Canadians have a say in what happens to their country.

By the very act of voting, they are playing an active role in the future of their country and their community, first by reflecting on the decision they must make and then by the decision itself. It is precisely for this undertaking that many people become citizens.

A deeper community and civic commitment is built on this foundation. It may lead to the creation of a minor hockey league for children, the organization of a tree-planting project or the cleaning of a ravine.

[English]

Unfortunately, voter participation in elections has been in decline over the years. In 1958, 79.4% of Canadians voted in that year's general election. However, that fell to 69% of eligible voters by 1993 and by 2004 only 60.5% of eligible voters cast a ballot.

Unfortunately, young people voted at even lower rates than previous generations. In fact, in the 2000 election, only about 25% of eligible voters between the ages of 18 and 24 bothered to vote.

It is undeniable that fewer people are going to the polls in Canada, yet we know that the one true method for citizens to hold their governments to account is through the ballot box. When voter turnout declines, it means that fewer people are holding their governments to account. The result is that our democratic system suffers.

We on this side of the House want to change the current situation. We want to see more people engaged in the political process and we want more people to vote.

[Translation]

A study led by Elections Canada indicates that many Canadians have trouble finding the time to go vote. Generally speaking, between work, studies and family, they do not have enough time to make it to the polls. I know that, on voting day, many people get up in the morning with the intention of voting, but because they have to work extra hours or because their kids have a minor hockey game that night, they do not find the time to exercise their right to vote.

At the same time, Canadians indicated that they appreciate the convenience of advance voting, and more and more voters are taking advantage of the opportunity to vote at advance polling stations. Indeed, voter turnout at advance polling stations nearly doubled between the 1997 election and the 2006 election.

Furthermore, the European example has shown that opening polling stations on Sundays leads to greater voter turnout. For instance, in the French presidential election held Sunday, May 6, voter turnout was 85%.

[English]

Therefore on May 9, 2007, we introduced the bill that we are debating today, Bill C-55, to increase voter turnout by giving Canadians more opportunities to vote.

The bill, which is part of our agenda to strengthen accountability and democracy in Canada, adds two advanced polling dates. One is on Sunday, the eighth day before election day, and the other is on Sunday, the day before election day.

The Sunday before election day will be a special advance poll. All polling stations used for the general voting day will be open on the last advanced polling day, not just a limited number of stations used for any other advanced polling days.

That means that Canadians will now have the choice of voting on election day, which is a Monday, or on Sunday, the day before election day or earlier at four other advanced polls.

This will mean all Canadians will have an opportunity to vote at an advanced poll right in their own neighbourhood on a Sunday which for many is a day without work or school commitments. This will make it easier for Canadians to vote.

With this increased convenience, we hope that families will bring their children with them when they go to vote, helping them to appreciate from an early age the civic duty and opportunity to cast a vote and to understand what it means to be a citizen in a free and democratic country.

These are lessons that if well taught last a lifetime, build stronger communities and make a brighter future for Canada. We know that engaging more Canadians in the electoral process through increasing voter turnout is good for our democracy and good for our country.

Government Orders

It is not just the government who is saying this. The expanded voting opportunities bill has also received the endorsement of academics and interested groups across Canada. For example, a group called Apathy is Boring, which aims at increasing youth voter participation, welcomes the bill. It said:

Apathy is Boring applauds the Expanded Voting Opportunities Bill, which makes a small but critical change to polling days. Accessibility is key to voter participation, and this bill will help ensure accessibility especially among young people.

Keith Archer, a professor of political science at the University of Calgary, said, "My view is that this legislation is a thoughtful and constructive response to the decline in voter participation in Canadian federal elections, and is aligned with the evident growth in the desire of Canadians to avail themselves of the opportunity to vote in advanced polls...the government is to be applauded for introducing this legislation".

Leslie Seidle, a senior research associate at the Institute for Research on Public Policy, said, "It ought to encourage more people to go to the polls by offering them additional time on what is a non-working day for most.

These comments show that the expanded voting opportunities bill is a modern, realistic and effective way to increase voter turnout in Canada. However, the bill is just one piece of our agenda to strengthen accountability and democracy in Canada.

• (1600)

[*Translation*]

Since coming into power, this government has made many efforts to develop concrete measures for democratic reform. One of these legislative measures, tabled in Parliament by this government, was Bill C-4 which led to a review of the rules governing the registration of a political party. And just before Christmas, we passed the Federal Accountability Act, which provides for new strict rules governing campaign financing. Loans by unions and businesses will be prohibited as will be anonymous contributions and trust funds, and the maximum annual donation to a political party is now \$1,100.

These two legislative initiatives will help restore the confidence of citizens in the democratic process.

[*English*]

Next we introduced Bill C-16 to establish fixed dates for elections. The bill sets the third Monday in October, four calendar years after each election, as the date of the next general election. Under the legislation, which is now law, the date of the next general election will be October 19, 2009.

Fixed date elections take the guesswork out of the electoral process and level the playing field for the Chief Electoral Officer, for political parties and, most importantly, for voters. They also encourage participation in the democratic process by allowing Canadians to plan to participate in their nation's electoral process.

[*Translation*]

I am very proud to announce that Bill C-16 has received royal assent despite all the efforts of the unelected Liberal senators to block implementation of the democratic reform proposed by our government.

[*English*]

Next we introduced Bill C-43, the Senate Appointment Consultations Act. With this bill we have acted to strengthen accountability with legislation that gives Canadians a say in who they want representing them in the Senate.

The proposed Senate appointment consultations act recognizes that it is the citizens of the country, not big money or backroom boys, who are best qualified to choose who should speak for them in the Senate. The Senate appointment consultations bill is currently being debated at second reading and we are anxious to see passage of this groundbreaking legislation.

That brings me to Bill S-4, the legislation that proposes to limit Senate terms to eight years instead of the current 45 years.

Today just happens to be the first birthday of the bill to limit the terms of senators. It has been delayed and obstructed by the Liberal Senate for a full year now. Remarkably, even though the Leader of the Opposition says he supports term limits for senators, Bill S-4 has been ensnared in procedural limbo since May 30, 2006, thanks to Liberal senators bent on obstructing and delaying any meaningful democratic reform.

We hope the Liberal senators will give the House of Commons a chance to actually deal with this bill one day.

[*Translation*]

As you can see, these legislative measures, including Bill C-31, which provides for the improvement of the integrity of the electoral process, as well as all the other bills tabled last week, are modern, realistic and effective and will strengthen our democracy and restore the confidence of Canadians in our democratic institutions.

The bill on expanded voting opportunities provides Canadian workers with more opportunities to vote so that they can make their government accountable. This is an effective means of ensuring an increase in voter turnout and strengthening democracy in Canada.

Unless we check declining voter turnout, we run the risk of having an increasing number of Canadians becoming disengaged from their government.

The way public affairs are conducted could become less democratic and less responsible.

• (1605)

[*English*]

For democracy to work, it must be the property of all, not just a place for narrow interests to pursue their own agenda. That is why it is important for more Canadians to participate in the democratic process. Voter participation is fundamental to the health of our democratic institutions.

Canada's new government is doing all it can to encourage citizens to participate in the democratic process.

Government Orders

[Translation]

This modern, realistic and effective legislative measure represents a new stage in the ambitious action plan that our government has developed to improve democratic institutions and to strengthen the vitality of democracy in Canada.

[English]

For all these reasons, I urge all members of the House to support the expanded voting opportunities bill.

Hon. Stephen Owen (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the government House leader for his eloquent refrain—I was going to say it was a pious refrain, but I say eloquent because that is a more friendly term—about the rights of the individual voter and how to attract through Bill C-55 more enthusiasm in voter turnout across this country. I accept that objective. I think this bill may go some way to doing so. I will speak later on behalf of the official opposition on that.

However, it does raise an important question when I hear repeated references to respect for the voter, references to giving opportunities to have their democratic will expressed and then reflected in the House, yet even before the 39th Parliament sat in the House after the last election, the first action of the Prime Minister, an action of unspeakable hypocrisy, was to appoint to his cabinet the member from Vancouver Kingsway, who was elected as a Liberal.

Let us just test that for a moment about respect for the voter and encouraging faith in our democratic system so as to attract more votes when, in that first single act, or it may have been appointing Senator Fortier to the Senate and then to cabinet—I cannot remember which was first or second—the hypocrisy was dripping.

I would like to ask the House leader about this. The Conservative candidate in Vancouver Kingsway had only 17% of the vote and all of the people who voted Liberal for the member from Vancouver Kingsway were absolutely left without representation. It was probably the greatest immediate act of luring in the history of this hallowed hall. Could the government House leader explain his earnest championing of the rights of the individual voter when the individual voters of Vancouver Kingsway have been so disgracefully rejected?

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Vancouver Quadra for this very tempting question. Of course I have next door to me the member for Newmarket—Aurora and also, not too far away, the member for Halton. I am not sure if the member for Vancouver Quadra today raised in caucus his intention to offer to return them to this caucus. I can tell the member that the government side is not really interested in their return, so that is all right.

Fundamentally, the government is interested in seeing the voters' will respected. That is what we are trying to do. That is why, for example, as I indicated, the government has proposed Bill C-43, the Senate consultations bill, which I know the member opposite in the Liberal Party opposed. It actually proposes to ask Canadians who they want to represent them in the Senate.

We live in something called a democracy. At least, that is what we in our party believe it is. That is what we want it to be. Part of a democracy, I thought, or at least as I was taught in school, is the notion that we elect people to represent us. However, in our

Parliament after 140 years, one of our two institutions, fully half of this building, is occupied by people who are appointed for 45 years, not elected.

We want to see them elected. We hear that is opposed by a Liberal Party that does not want to see any change in the Senate. That party does not want to see senators elected. It likes those privileges and it likes the Senate the way it is.

When it comes time to respecting the will of the voters and showing some respect for the concept of democracy, I suspect that in his heart the member for Vancouver Quadra sympathizes a lot with the notion of electing senators. I know that because he comes from a part of British Columbia where there is strong support for it. It is a place where there is strong support for the concept of Senate term limits. As the member has indicated in the past, there is strong support for our proposed bill on democratic representation. These are all things designed to improve the quality of our democracy.

I have a lot of sympathy for the member for Vancouver Quadra in trying to advance those notions in a party that is generally not supportive of them, but I thank the member for the opportunity to underline the fact that on this side we do want to see the voters' will respected, not just in the House of Commons but in the Senate as well.

● (1610)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): At this moment I will recognize the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay. I would just like to give him some parameters. Because there are other members who want to ask questions, I am giving him 75 seconds.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we had 10 minutes from the previous one and now you are saying other people have to speak. In all fairness—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I am just trying to be fair to all members. I recognize the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, we hear the government talk about respect for voters and we hear those members talk about this nice little notion of an advance poll. Let us be honest about what this advance poll really is.

This advance poll means that on Sunday morning, the one day in our community when people can spend time with their families, thousands of volunteers are going to be pounding on people's doors and cranking up the phone banks to bother people again and again, asking them if they have been out to vote. This is not an advance poll. This is going to be a full-out election day on Sunday.

Sunday is the one day that families have together, whether they go to church like many people in my community do, or whether they just want to be together. The member talked about being more open to the public and having people vote. People need to have a reason to vote. Having politicians in their face on a Sunday is certainly not going to encourage people to participate in the democratic system. If the member wants some respect from our voters, he should respect the one day they have with their families and just stay away from them and get out of their face.

Government Orders

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, I did not realize that the member for Timmins—James Bay found that there was such a difficult, hostile reaction when he was presenting himself to his electors. Certainly I have not found that to be my experience. I find that electors actually welcome the opportunity to interface with their members of Parliament and to have the opportunity to speak with them.

First, in terms of our advance poll, it would not happen on Sunday morning. It would not start until noon. Sunday morning is a protected time. The member does not have to worry about that.

Second, there is no compulsion on people to vote that day. There are multitudes of opportunities, including the election day on Monday and advance polls on a Friday, a Saturday, and a Monday. This is the kind of freedom that we think people should have. We have it in every other aspect of our society. We have full commercial activity now on Sundays. We have full sports activities on Sundays, which I know was a great crusade about 50 or 60 years ago, and it continues. Our society gives that freedom to all Canadians.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques. There are 2 minutes and 20 seconds for the question and answer.

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I will ask only one of the questions I had, but I will make the following observation. With respect to the Leader of the Government's argument that the decline in turnout is due solely to a lack of opportunities to vote, I would like to remind him first of all that people can vote almost every day, even if not in their own neighbourhood.

I am sure that a responsible government has analyzed the costs. So I would like to know what the total cost of this initiative would be if it were approved. Then, as there is always another side to the story, what are the negative effects of this suggestion?

•(1615)

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Indeed, Mr. Speaker, we have assessed that obviously there are costs if we run additional advance polls, such as staffing costs and so on, as there are in any democracy. We foresee a one time expense of \$6.8 million for information technology and recurring per election expenses of \$30.4 million for additional polling salaries. It is roughly a 10% or 11% difference in the cost of running an election.

The member has asked a difficult question. We do have a lot of research, and she is quite right when she says that inconvenience is not the only reason for declining voter turnout. It is, however, the reason among at least one-third to one-half of the people who did not vote, depending on who one talks to. Their reason is that difficulty in being able to vote. This is the advantage of the Sunday opportunity. We have seen a steep increase in the use of advance polls, which tells us that people's lives are busier. There is more stress with family and work. We are trying to accommodate the different and complex modern lives people have by creating this additional opportunity. I think that is a welcome thing.

Yes, everything we do in a democracy in having elections has a price, but we think it is a price well worth paying, because the alternative to not having elections to save money and not allowing people to vote is one that we think is much more damaging to our society in terms of the quality of our democracy and our representation.

Hon. Stephen Owen (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today on behalf of the official opposition to speak to Bill C-55.

I must say at the outset and to the government House leader that whether his remarks were respectful or pious, or however his remarks might have been characterized in terms of the rights of the individual voter, I agree with him that additional advance voting days will be appropriate. It will be one way, perhaps, that we can get increased voter turnout for the most important political action in this country for individual Canadians, their most important democratic action.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order to ask for unanimous consent to move a motion, which was adopted in the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration: That this government stops deporting undocumented workers until the committee reports to the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

An hon. member: No.

Hon. Stephen Owen: Mr. Speaker, the debate on Bill C-55 provides the opportunity for us to have a wider debate as well on democratic reform.

However we might support the bill, and I support it very strongly to give greater opportunities for individual electors to get to the polls and vote, there is a difficulty with the government's approach to democratic reform as a whole. This is one other example of issues being brought to the House in both a piecemeal fashion, instead of a comprehensive way, as well as in a way that has involved no consultation with the other parties, the provinces or the public in general.

It is passing strange that we have seen a series of piecemeal bills not dealing comprehensively with either Senate reform, electoral reform or parliamentary reform, but trying to nick them off one at a time. They are done in the name of greater public engagement, when the public, nor Parliament, nor the other parties and provinces are engaged in consultation beforehand to see what might be the best way to move forward to ensure that these various elements of electoral, parliamentary and Senate reform are going ahead in a comprehensive way that makes sense with each other and do not give rise to unintended or, even worse, intended consequences of the government.

Government Orders

Let us look at this approach with respect to other aspects of, in this case, electoral reform. Cooperation and collaboration is immensely important, especially in this complex federation in which we are fortunate enough to live. We have many levels of government, constitutional divisions of power and high sensitivities to overlapping powers and impacts that actions and legislation in one level or order of government may have on another. That is why it is so important to have full consultation. Let me speak to a few.

Bill C-56 would attempt to better reflect the constitutional principle of representation by population by adding extra seats to British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario. This sounds like, in constitutional principle, a very valid objective with which to go forward.

It can be said that this is something within the individual competence of the Parliament of Canada with which provincial and territorial governments do not have to give their consent. However, that completely misses the complex nature of our country and the need for collaboration among different levels of government to make things happen in a way that best reflects the interests of the whole country and does not lead to any unintended consequences.

Bill C-56 has been introduced and it sounds good. I am a member of Parliament from British Columbia and British Columbia is to get seven extra seats to bring it up to representation by population, as with the five extra seats in Alberta. However, almost immediately we get a unanimous vote in the motion condemning this by the National Assembly of Quebec. Within a week of that, we get both the Conservative leader in the Ontario legislature plus the Premier of Ontario saying that they are against it and are considering legal action on the basis that this is inappropriate.

Since the bill has been discussed, we have heard in the last two weeks concern expressed from members from the prairie provinces, Manitoba and Saskatchewan. They feel their relative influence in the House may be slipping even though their absolute numbers stay the same. We have also heard from MPs from Atlantic Canada who may be protected in certain ways from having their absolute numbers slip, but are worried about their declining influence in the House.

That is not to say they all have to be completely taken into full account. There may be, and obviously is in this case, some kind of negotiation and collaboration that has to go forward so the range of interests in the House, reflecting the interests of the different regions of the country, is properly protected and balanced. But that requires consultation.

• (1620)

That is why we would like Bill C-56 to go to committee before second reading, so there can be the fullest scope for the consultation to take place and that we in committee, as members of Parliament individually, can consult with the various provinces that have various information on it.

One of the most foundational issues of conflict resolution, and there seems to be conflict in this case, is that we involve everyone in the discussion who is affected by it. They will be interested in it and perhaps have the best information about it, without trying to prejudge that.

I raise that as an issue, as a bit of a paradox of putting forward legislation that is meant to make things more democratic, when in fact it is cutting off a prior consultation that would be effective in making the democracy more effective.

That takes me to issues of the Senate, and they were raised by the government House leader. He raised the issue of Bill S-4, which would limit the terms of senators. Let me take a step back and again reflect that this is piecemeal and without adequate consultation.

There is a complaint that this has been stuck in the Senate for a year. In fact, a very important motion was put before the Senate, which is very much related to this, by former Senator Jack Austin and the sole remaining Progressive Conservative senator, Senator Lowell Murray. It would look to the addition of seats to western Canada in the Senate, to bring some proportionality to the regions of Canada, which was intended by our founding fathers, the Fathers of Confederation.

That raises the issue of distribution again, which makes it very clear why piecemeal approaches to Senate reform, electoral reform and parliamentary reform are so inappropriate. If we look at the Senate, there are three critical areas of the other place that must be respected if we are to have change. I think we all agree, including members of the Senate, that a modern democracy should not have a legislative assembly which is non-elected. It is how we get there that is important. To get there, we have to deal with three things simultaneously in Senate reform.

One is the selection process, and that could be both the terms and the fixed dates that have been suggested in Bill S-4. It also could become the selection process and the consultative elections that have been suggested in Bill C-43. The problem is that this is only one of three categories.

Another category is the mandate of the other place. Is it to be, as it is now, a mirror image of the legislative authority, only altered by convention of this place, that creates the expectation of deference at some stage after full debate in both places, or is there to be something different?

If it exactly the same, and electoral legitimacy is equal by elected senators or consultatively elected senators, however Bill C-43 puts it, then we will risk gridlock and that we must avoid. To deal with that, we must have either different mandates or offset mandates or a dispute resolution clause to deal with problems that might arise between the Houses of Parliament. Therefore, a second stage is neglected in just dealing with Bill S-4 or Bill C-43.

Government Orders

A third area, and perhaps in many ways in terms of the health of our Confederation the most important, is the distribution of Senate seats across the country. I notice in Bill C-56 there is an attempt to arrange for better representation. I say attempt because, as I have mentioned, the government has not done the proper consultation to get the very best answer for that. There is no enthusiasm whatsoever to contemporaneously, in looking for Senate elections or Senate set terms, look at distribution, and most important, the extraordinarily inequitable distribution across the country with respect to western Canada.

• (1625)

It is hard to imagine that members of the government, who represent ridings in western Canada, could possibly be in favour, including the Prime Minister, of trying to give more status, more validity to the other place as a legislative body without first fixing the inequitable distribution across the west. That is passing strange, but it is another example of doing things piecemeal without proper consultation and without dealing with them comprehensively.

Let us look for a moment at electoral reform, because this is immensely important to members of the House. It is part of the old Bill C-55, which attempts to address a small corner of electoral reform.

We have a suggested consultative process by the government, which put out tenders to hire a polling firm and then hire, some would say, a think tank. In fact, it turns out to be Frontier Centre in Winnipeg, which has published works against notions of proportionality to amend, improve and reform our electoral system. It is to hold so-called deliberative, closed door meetings in a few centres in the country, which is somehow some kind of a substitute for a meaningful public discussion on the very desperately needed electoral reform in our country.

It is worse than that, because it is in the face of two other clear opportunities, one is an exercise and another is before us, to do this properly. Again, in reverse order, we do not pretend to consult and then bring in some kind of response to that without going to the people and to the opposition and looking to parliamentary committees and other expert bodies first. This is a jury-rigged, false consultation, which will do nothing for the health of our elective democracy.

Let us look at what the other options are. The Law Commission of Canada is highly respected internationally as one of the foremost law reform bodies in the Commonwealth. Its reports are watched and followed in many other countries. After extensive real public consultation and extensive research here and internationally on electoral reform, in 2004 it published a very thoughtful deliberative piece on a mixed member proportional system. This is an independent statutory body with the responsibility to consult, to do research and to report publicly to Parliament and the Minister of Justice. It reported more than three years ago now and there has been no response, no reflection of any attention being given to that good work.

In 2004 we also had the Speech from the Throne, which was amended in the sense of its application to include electoral reform as a prime objective of the 38th Parliament. Unfortunately and unnecessarily it was interrupted by an election that was commenced

in 2005. The work of a special committee to do the proper consultation on behalf of all the House of Commons was cut short.

We should be working with the opposition parties, and I hope with the government, to have a legislative committee, perhaps the procedure and House affairs committee, hold those consultations, rather than the closed door, jury-rigged type of consultation that has been set forward. That is important. Let us have the House involved. Let us look to real public consultation and let us get moving on real electoral reform.

Maybe in the wisdom of that deliberative discussion with Canadians, we can reaffirm the first past the post system we have now, but let us do it when we know there are real strains and real non-representative aspects to it. Let us have that conversation and make it a real deliberative one.

Let me turn to another aspect of democratic reform. This is one about which we have heard so much rhetoric from the government, and that is the Federal Accountability Act, Bill C-2. It is almost Orwellian in the way that aspects of this act, and aspects that certainly this side of the House supported, are actually damaging and non-democratic.

• (1630)

I start with observing that Bill C-2, the accountability act, got royal assent on December 14, 2006. Members will recall that this was following a number of months of very careful deliberations and amendments passed by the Senate and then accepted by the House. I think there were more than 50 of them.

There was constant deriding of the other place for having delayed that important piece of democratic legislation and yet one of the absolutely most important foundational parts of the accountability act was the appointments commission. This would apply the same principles around public service appointments that the Public Service Commission applies: objective criteria, competitive processes, transparency, real accountability. That appointments commission which was part of the act in a form that in fact the NDP put forward, a form that I put forward as an amendment were not accepted. That was five months ago .

I will end with this reflection on non-accountability. After five months, there is no appointments commission and yet every week there are dozens and dozens and dozens of order in council appointments that should have been subject to that merit based, objective, non-partisan appointments commission. What kind of accountability is that? What kind of democratic reform is that?

While I have no difficulty supporting the idea of greater advance opportunities for people to vote to increase voter opportunity and therefore voter turnout, we have to look at the whole picture and, if we are to be taken seriously as a modern democracy, deal with this in a comprehensive way.

Government Orders

•(1635)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raynald Blais (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my Liberal colleague if the bill before us looks like what I would call a simplistic solution to a complex problem. The voter turnout rate decreases from year to year or from election to election, I should say. But there are opportunities to vote. For example, people can vote at any time, provided they go to a specific place. Unfortunately, in some ridings that place can be some distance away.

We wanted to simplify the process. But despite the solutions that have been proposed, with each election people are becoming uneasy about democracy and participation.

My impression—my colleague perhaps shares my view—is that the proposed solution could be considered simplistic. Adding two days will not automatically resolve the problem of voter turnout.

[*English*]

Hon. Stephen Owen: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member has put it very well. This is a necessary step to take. I support it because it adds some opportunity.

The difficulty is that it is presented by the government House leader as some kind of comprehensive answer to voter apathy, low voter turnout. It may be a small step to make more opportunity available to some people. It is fine to have it, but it does not get at what we really need to get at in this country.

We need a thorough examination of electoral reform on a comprehensive basis and a thorough analysis of why there is apathy in this country not just of inconvenience but apathy that is borne out of people's mistrust of the political process. Perhaps it is broken promises. They are one of the greatest causes of apathy. I do not simply point to the Conservative government for breaking its promises because I think that we would find in our history that every governing party at every level of government in the political process has intentionally or unintentionally broken promises. But where we have some very clear promises where electoral legitimacy was given, then I think we have to really ensure that in this House we, as an opposition, call the government to account and that the government show responsibility in making sure that we keep faith with the electorate.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague has been fairly consistent and reputable on the issue of democratic reform, so I welcomed his comments.

It was interesting that there was quite a buzz when this announcement was made by the government. It was during the so-called week of democratic reform, on the Wednesday. I recall it well. I went out to the lawn of Parliament Hill and there was great fanfare. There were a number of young people who turned out to be interns who had been marshalled in by the government for a photo op.

We all thought there was going to be a great announcement on democratic reform and that we would be marshalling ourselves into a new and pleasant day in a green and pleasant land. Then we found out that the announcement was an extra day of advanced polling and that the government had taken the interns and put them in the photo op simply for this announcement.

I am curious as to my colleague's thoughts around this kind of democratic reform. It dropped out of the sky from nowhere, like Bill C-56. In fact, that bill has already become a problem for the government because the Conservatives did not consult anyone.

The only people the government consulted on this bill I think were the interns who were asked to be in the photo op.

What does the member think about the government's consultation process on this bill?

•(1640)

Hon. Stephen Owen: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's comments build on those of our colleague from the Bloc in terms of the superficiality of the bill, if I could put it that way. I do not think anyone is going to take much issue with the extra opportunity that the bill provides for voters to get out and vote, perhaps more conveniently.

The government has dressed the bill up as a major piece of democratic reform. I was not lured out that day, but I did watch with interest from afar to see what the great announcement would be. I must say I was left quite unsatisfied with the announcement.

It is important that we take these steps but let us do it seriously. Let us pull together all of the ideas. Let us have a national consultation. For goodness' sake, let us talk to each other in this House to build the best possible legislation to go forward. We should also talk to our provincial counterparts to see if there may be any unintended consequences or if there are better ideas of how to approach it without bringing legislation before the House, having provincial premiers talk about going to court or having other provincial legislatures reject the idea outright.

As well meaning as some of these little pieces might be, they do not build the faith that we need in this House, in the seriousness of our approach to respecting the democratic complexity of our country, our Constitution. We must work together to get the very best system possible. We must be as responsible as possible in the reform. When we do that comprehensively, I can assure the House that it will do more for voter turnout in this country, because it is not just inconvenience, it is apathy that is reducing the numbers.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I will be brief. I want to share an observation and if my colleague wants to respond to it, he is obviously free to do so.

I was shocked earlier by the way the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons was talking about this bill, especially in the last 10 minutes. He was talking about this bill as the be-all and end-all—like all the other bills the government has introduced—for democratic reform.

This really irritates me. If the Conservative government truly thought this was important it would focus on something essential, on the voter turnout the hon. member was just talking about. Holding consultations will yield better voter turnout. Respect, both for citizens and their representatives here, is a basic concept.

The truly simple and necessary thing to do is to talk to people and hold consultations at every level.

Government Orders

No one will be fooled by this 20 minute presentation.

[*English*]

Hon. Stephen Owen: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for that observation. I agree with the hon. member that the essence of a democracy is public participation.

We are a self-governing people in this democracy. To self-govern we have to be engaged. To be engaged we have to be informed of options and consulted on our ideas, either on what is being proposed or on other alternative ideas we may not have thought of.

It is immensely important that those of us in this House, all of us together, whatever party we might represent, talk together, and most important, talk to and listen to members of the public about the ideas we are throwing around for consideration.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this is another opportunity for me to rise on a bill that is far from revolutionary. I have said so several times, and I believe that the same sentiment has been expressed many times in this House in the past few months. It is hard to be opposed to this bill. But at the same time, it does not attack the root of the problem of voter turnout, which is not dropping dramatically, but declining from year to year, particularly at the federal level.

This bill is intended to increase voter turnout. It proposes to add two advance polling days on the two Sundays prior to polling day. All the polling stations that will be open on the day of the general election would be open on the Sunday before that day, maximizing—according to the bill's sponsors—voting opportunities until polls close on the Monday after the second Sunday. On the other advance polling days, a limited number of polling stations would be open, as is the case now.

It seems to me to be a bit simplistic to expect that adding advance polling days will reverse the strong downward trend in voter turnout. However, we cannot oppose a relatively minor measure that would create a real opportunity for some people to vote on the added Sundays. We will therefore not vote against this bill. However, in our opinion, this is a minor measure that will not correct the strong downward trend in voter turnout. The government needs to attack the real causes of this decrease, which are diverse.

I want to give the figures for some past elections, which show that voter turnout at advance polls does not have a substantial or significant impact on general voter turnout on polling day.

For example, here are the results from Quebec for the 1997 federal election. Approximately 704,000 people voted at advance polls, some 3.6% of everyone who voted in the 1997 election. Again, I am referring to the federal election, but these figures pertain only to voters in Quebec. The overall voter turnout was 67%.

In 2006, during the last federal election, 1.5 million voters voted at advance polls in Quebec, or 6.8%. Thus, 6.8% voted in advance. One might have expected this to translate into much higher voter turnout, since the number of people who voted at advance polls nearly doubled. Yet, when we look at the overall voter turnout in the 2006 election, for Quebec, it was only 64.7%. We can therefore see

that increasing the number of days of advance polling does not necessarily lead to higher voter turnout overall.

In that regard, we must ask ourselves whether the money it would cost to open polling stations the Sunday before an election—since, as we heard, all polling stations would be open that day—could not be used much more productively towards increasing overall voter turnout.

For instance, the total number of polling stations in each riding could have been increased, to make them more accessible. Also, particularly for our seniors, we could have tried to find ways to ensure they do not have to travel. I think there is a long list of possible solutions that would have been much more effective in increasing voter turnout, which, as we know, is decreasing every year.

• (1645)

Once again, I believe that the crux of the problem is not a function of the mechanics but of the general context and our citizens' views of politics. This holds true for Canada, and to a certain extent for Quebec, which nevertheless has a higher voter turnout. We have noticed it also in the United States and in France, although this last presidential election was quite exceptional with voter turnout of 85%. It may be an exception, but that is all for the best. Perhaps there is a change in the trend.

In my view, this fairly widespread tendency—particularly in industrialized countries where voter turnout is decreasing with every election—should lead us to look more closely at the general public's perception of politicians and of politics. For example, almost every government that has taken power, here in Ottawa and in many western countries, has told us—and the Minister of Industry is one of the best examples that I know of—that nothing can be done about the effects of globalization and market forces, and that the strongest must be able to crush the weakest as it is the law of nature manifesting itself in society.

That is wrong. A good part of the population, a good number of voters, have been led to believe that voting for representatives when electing a government is pointless because they are unable to solve their problems. What can the federal government do to help a worker from Saint-Michel-des-Saints who is losing his job because a Louisiana-Pacific sawmill and waferboard plant are shutting down?

The Minister of Industry is constantly telling us that nothing can be done, that these are the results of market forces and that no manner of industrial policy will prevent it. It could not have been prevented. But I say that it could have been prevented.

Government Orders

I would like to remind the House that, since 2003, the Bloc Québécois has been promoting a plan to help the forestry industry get through the current crisis. However, the previous Liberal government and the current Conservative government have always hidden behind market forces and the unrelenting effects of globalization. We know very well that when the citizens' democratic will is expressed through its democratic institutions, we are capable of putting a stop to things, of changing the course of events in economic, social or environmental matters.

For example, some countries, such as France, have said they did not want to be part of the multilateral agreement on investment and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, because they were negotiating privately. This would diminish the role of the state and its ability to exercise its sovereignty. France was able to stop this agreement, and this decision was made in the general interest.

At that time, the French president did not say that he could do nothing about it because of market forces and that this was the natural tendency. On the contrary, he said that this was not the direction in which he wanted to see French society and all other societies in the world go.

Currently, there is a disillusionment with respect to politics that is the fault of politicians. Obviously I am not talking about all politicians, but about those who, like the Minister of Industry, say that democratic institutions and political power no longer have any influence over economic, environmental and social matters. Not only are they responsible for this disillusionment, but they have also created in the population—this is true in Canada, Quebec, Europe, Latin America and the United States—a protectionist sentiment against opening up markets and borders. For three or four years, the Doha round has been blocked by the inability of governments to turn the people of the countries involved in favour of opening up the markets with rules, of course. Politicians could have made rules, but they did not want to. Because politicians did not want to make rules, the process collapsed.

It primarily collapsed because of the demonstrations in Seattle. But the developing countries said that in the last round, the developed countries had advantages, but had not done what was necessary to open their markets. So the developing countries decided to put a stop to it.

• (1650)

This happened because of the approach adopted by the Minister of Industry and the Conservative government. Not only did this approach lead to the current standstill in WTO and Free Trade Area of the Americas negotiations, but it also led to political disenchantment. This way of thinking is false because if we want to, we can use politics to influence economic, cultural, social and environmental issues. This way of thinking has led to disillusionment among many people who believe that voting is pointless because even citizens' representatives are powerless to help them get through difficult situations.

Unfortunately, politicians like our Minister of Industry and our Prime Minister have caused problems in other areas as well. This is also about transparency. We must not fool ourselves: the sponsorship scandal really hurt the Liberal Party of Canada, especially in Quebec,

and that is a good thing. However, unfortunately, it also hurt politicians as a whole.

Our governments have demonstrated their ineptitude. I am referring to the Liberal government, but I have a feeling that the Conservative government is heading in the same direction by trying to fiddle with things. In so doing, they have discredited their own political activities as well as all politicians, and that is a real shame. They got caught red-handed, which is exactly what they deserved.

We are currently facing another situation. With respect to Option Canada, the Prime Minister can launch an independent public inquiry to uncover everything that happened during the 1995 referendum. Let us not forget that the government invested \$11 million—no small sum—through Option Canada and the Canadian Unity Council. I would also like to mention that each camp—the yes camp and the no camp—was entitled to \$5 million. Option Canada spent as much as both camps combined. In all, the federal government invested over twice as much as the yes camp.

The Prime Minister's refusal to launch an investigation to get to the bottom of this is, understandably, creating doubt among Canadians. It suggests that the first thing a government would try to do is hide as much as possible from the public, by creating organizations such as Option Canada, which break the law. This time, it was Quebec's Referendum Act. Theoretically, politicians should be the ones to ensure respect for the law, since parliamentarians are the ones who make the law.

This creates rather serious uneasiness. We saw this uneasiness during the sponsorship scandal. We are seeing it again now, because of the Prime Minister's refusal to create a commission of inquiry to get to the bottom of the Option Canada scandal. This is a second factor in our problem with voter turnout. Unfortunately, more and more people are losing faith in the role of MPs and therefore choose not to vote.

In his response, the minister responsible for economic development said so many things that are out of touch with reality and the facts that, if I were a regular citizen, I would not vote for the Conservatives—I can assure this House that that will never happen, nor have I ever even considered it, in all my years of voting. This creates a degree of cynicism. I will give some examples.

Question period took place barely a few hours ago. I will give the example of one of this government's ministers. Earlier today, the Minister of Industry was in my line of fire, now, it is the Minister of Labour. What did that minister say in response to a question from a Liberal member, who asked him what was happening with the bill on bankruptcy, once known as Bill C-55?

Government Orders

• (1655)

The Minister of Labour stood up and said that everyone agrees, but the Bloc Québécois is blocking the bill. That is absolutely false. The Bloc Québécois is not blocking the bill. The minister is blocking it by digging in his heels on an amendment that the governments of Quebec and the other provinces want in order to ensure that the federal legislation will be consistent with provincial legislation. I have here the proposed amendment on which we worked together with the Government of Quebec. The minister has been aware of this for several weeks now. However, he is misrepresenting reality by saying that the Bloc is preventing the passage of this bill. We are in favour of the bill, but we are also in favour of respecting Quebec's jurisdictions. In his response, the minister completely misrepresented reality. What we are trying to do with this amendment is protect Quebec's power to exclude certain heritage property in bankruptcy situations, to keep RRSPs and RRSFs in comprehensive plans and to respond in a simple and effective manner to the concerns raised by Quebec's finance minister, a Liberal and a federalist. I am talking about Mr. Audet.

Once again, words were taken out of context and reality was misrepresented. Everyone is well aware that the Minister of Labour was not describing reality. Again, they are discrediting the ability of politicians, hon. members, ministers and members of this government in particular, to respond to questions accurately and truthfully.

On other occasions the debate is completely diverted. I am thinking of the Minister of Labour in his role as Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada.

The Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women was asked about the \$60 million over two years for festivals. Some festivals are starting to have serious problems. Mr. Bachand, Quebec's tourism minister, warned Conservative ministers when they come to Quebec not to make too many appearances at festivals because he was not sure they would be welcome. Again, Mr. Bachand is a Liberal and a federalist.

For several days now, we have been trying to ask the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women why she has been unable to establish criteria to distribute the \$30 million allocated to festivals this year. This is true for Quebec, and it is also true for the rest of Canada. Her answers do not really make sense.

My colleague from Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine brought the issue up again by sharing the example of a festival in the Magdalen Islands that lost its permit in a competition because it did not have the necessary funds. Then the Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec—the same minister I was talking about earlier—rose to say that last year, the government invested a certain amount of money to promote the event, but that this year, since the event has already been promoted, it invested a little less. He did not answer the question. The question was for the Minister of Canadian Heritage concerning a new program to replace the old program that the Liberals messed up with the sponsorship scandal. Festivals, exhibitions and cultural events need the government's support. They did not answer the question; they are avoiding the issue.

This sort of conduct has increased in recent years, especially here in Ottawa, and has discouraged many people from voting. It is very clear that by adding two days of advance polling, Bill C-55 will not solve this fundamental problem.

All parliamentarians need to do some serious soul-searching about their ability not only to see the truth for what it is and give honest answers to the questions they are asked, but also to shoulder their responsibilities instead of hiding behind so-called market forces and the inevitable effects of globalization. They are creating a sort of skepticism and defeatism among members of the public. Once again, even though we are seeing this more here in Ottawa than in Quebec City, it will still have an impact if nothing is done to correct things.

I will close by saying that the Prime Minister was asked to apologize for the federal government's actions during the referendum campaign, when the government violated the Referendum Act. He refused to do so. I am happy, though, that this afternoon, the Premier of Quebec, Jean Charest, condemned the violations of the Referendum Act, even though he had initially had the same reaction as the Prime Minister. I believe that his response may signal that politics will be cleaned up. It is to be hoped that a new generation of politicians—and I am not referring to age—will change these practices and promote greater voter participation in our electoral process.

• (1700)

[*English*]

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the bill that is before us states as its objective to increase voter participation, the interest of our citizens to get involved in the electoral process.

I was taken by the comments made by the member with respect to ways in which we could become more effective in the House that would engage Canadians in critical issues. I think the member would agree the critical issues that affect Canadians range from the erosion of jobs in the manufacturing sector to world peace.

The point made by the member is that this bill falls short of really challenging us in a constructive and instructive way to change the system in order to engage Canadians and then bring them into democratic participation.

My question for the member is this. Is there any experience in Quebec with respect to the universities, reaching out to youth, and targeting those groups that have not been engaged in the democratic process? Is there any experience in Quebec that the member could allude to which might be instructive for the government to really engage Canadians and get them involved in the voting process in this country?

• (1705)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his question.

Government Orders

As I said earlier, voter turnout in Quebec is higher. I think that this is because the political debate there focuses on more fundamental issues than it does here in Ottawa. I am not saying that to be mean. Politically, the constitutional future of Quebec gives rise to a sense of competition. As a result, voter turnout is higher in Quebec, especially among young people, even though they vote less than older people.

I think that the lesson here is about political issues and how we should be debating them. I am not against taking steps to facilitate voter turnout. People have to feel that their vote makes a difference and will affect not only their community's future, but also their own. I think that this is what has been lacking in Canada and in most western societies over the past few years.

As I suggested in my counter-example, during the recent elections in France, where voter turnout had been in decline, Mr. Sarkozy and Ms. Royal talked about issues that would have an impact on France's future, which resulted in an 85% voter turnout. I think that we should work toward that rather than on superficial measures, like those in Bill C-55. Even so, we will not oppose it. Fundamentally, we still have to ask ourselves questions about how we do politics in Canada, in Quebec and in the entire western world.

Mr. Marcel Lussier (Brossard—La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, the member for Joliette, for his excellent presentation. I would like to ask him two questions.

With regard to the list of electors, does the member for Joliette believe that it is reliable?

Second, can voters still register at the last minute if, for example, they move a few weeks before an election? If they bring proof of residence, can they go to the advance poll or to the polling station on the day of the election? Does the new law change that?

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Brossard—La Prairie for his question, which will also allow me to complete my response.

In Quebec, the permanent voters list is an extremely important tool. For example, every time a person moves and changes their address on their driver's licence or social insurance card, the address is automatically changed on the voters list. This makes life easier for the Chief Electoral Officer and also for the individual, who will not have to jump through hoops to ensure that their name is on the voters list. This does not solve every problem since some people do not have a driver's licence, although people usually have a health insurance card. Nonetheless, this makes it easier to register voters, who then receive a notice from the Chief Electoral Officer.

The federal Chief Electoral Officer wants to incorporate this permanent list. It has been noted during past elections that this list was quite incomplete and people who honestly thought they were registered on voters lists learned they were not.

At the federal level, rather than address this problem by creating a permanent voters list, they decided to allow voters to be added to the voters list on election day, which sometimes causes problems in terms of identifying the voters and their eligibility to vote. In Quebec, a voter can only be added to the voters list during the period scheduled by law for the revision of the voters list. In my opinion

this provides a better guarantee to citizens who have the right to vote and greater fairness for everyone.

The response of the Chief Electoral Officer and Parliament was to create a new gadget to respond to a real problem. I think they should have opted for a real tool like a permanent list. That is precisely the type of suggestion that Bill C-55 proposes. I am not against allowing people to register on election day since the voters list is so poorly managed. However, I think we should address the real problem, and that is the quality of the voters list. We should make it easier for people to register on this list before the election to make sure they are eligible to vote.

• (1710)

[English]

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague had a rather lengthy dissertation on various topics, some of which I thought did begin to stray a bit from the matter at hand here, but really he was talking in terms of what he felt were some of the causes for poorer participation in elections.

As I consider some of the points that have been brought up this afternoon, it has been interesting to see that in other jurisdictions that have in fact expanded to Sunday voting and increased advanced polling, certainly the statistics suggest, both in this country but also in Europe, they are getting in some cases as high as a 10 point increase.

As a matter of fact, even in the province of Quebec, and I thought this was rather instructional, I have come to understand that advance polls are conducted on a Sunday both in municipal elections in the province of Quebec and provincial elections.

Therefore, I would suggest that in fact what we are seeing here in this bill before us, Bill C-55, is intending to address the very problems and issues of which the member speaks. I wonder whether he would feel that this approach in fact is going to do exactly as his home province would suggest, where participation has increased, and that this bill is in fact right on the mark, and it is going to create the kinds of results in voter participation that are needed.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, as I said, we are not opposed to this measure; however, in our view, it is not enough to make us believe that voter turnout will change significantly. If we do not engage citizens and make them want to vote on the issues that are democratically debated and decided by a vote, all we are doing is shifting the timing of the vote. The most recent Quebec election provides an example of this. Voter turnout at the advance polls reached 10%, a record high. More than 500,000 votes were cast at advance polls in Quebec; however, the voter turnout was the same as in 2003. Voters who would have cast their ballots on Monday, March 26, simply voted at advance polls.

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In closing, I would say it is somewhat like the hours of operation of a business. More shopping hours do not translate into more purchases by consumers. If they could shop 24/7, they would not buy more because they do not have more money in their pockets and they cannot go any further into debt. We must not believe that Bill C-55 will solve all our problems. We must avoid simply displacing the votes that would be cast anyway, on the day of a general election.

• (1715)

[English]

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to speak in the House to this bill. I want to outline a number of things the government has said about this bill. I want to look at what, I believe, is the motivation for this bill. I also want to talk about some of the concerns about the bill that have been brought to my attention. I will then underline the void left by the government on the whole issue of fairness and voting on democratic reform that the bill does not really substantively deal with.

I will begin with the bill itself in terms of when we first heard about it. As I mentioned in questions and comments earlier, it was with much fanfare on the front lawn of the House of Commons that the announcement was made. As I previously said, we were told there was a big announcement coming on democratic reform and, in fact, the government even titled the week democratic reform week. We were all wondering with great anticipation what the announcement would be.

There was a great photo op with all the interns together to make it look good on camera. The minister came out and announced that there would be what we thought would be democratic reform, like the mixed member system or some other substantive proposal, but, lo and behold, he announced that the government would be expanding advance polling. People in the crowd made some comments and even the media asked, "They brought us out here for this".

In fact, the page from the press release that I have in front of me on the bill itself is pretty small. It contains the main parts of the bill but it is what we call piecemeal. I say that because the government is trying to brand itself, as it says now, as getting things done on democratic reform, which is a laudable goal. Some would say that is the way to do it, one piece at a time, but the problem is that there was absolutely no consultation on this bill.

This idea came from what looks like the back room of the Conservative Party to cover for the fact that it had not done some things on democratic reform, like the triple E Senate that many in the party had gotten involved in politics on. In fact, we are hearing now from the backbench that the Conservatives have not been able to deliver on the triple E Senate. The government had to come up with something so it came up with Bill C-55 and Bill C-56. That is the background, the trajectory of how we got this bill.

The claims that the government has made are very interesting. When the minister spoke on this bill today he said things like, "We want more people to vote", "Elections Canada has indeed identified that people need more time to vote", "Canadians need more opportunity to vote", et cetera. Of course no one will disagree with that. The problem is that the Conservatives make assertions that this bill will be the grandiose architecture for changing our democratic

system so that we will see more voter participation and that it somehow will deal with all the ills that exist in our present system.

However, there is a cost to this. As the minister said today, it will cost somewhere around \$38 million for this initiative, an initiative that the government has not consulted on but just dreamed up and brought forward. I say that because it is important to underline.

This is not a bill that was discussed at committee nor was it discussed during the election. It also was not discussed in the House. This is not a bill that Canadians were clamouring the government to act on. That is important to note. In my opinion, this is the piecemeal approach of the Conservative Party to cover for the fact that it has not delivered on its triple E Senate promise.

The minister also stated that there was more advance voting in 2006. I see some smiles from my friends so I must be hitting a nerve. Therefore, this will be a continuation of that and there will be more voting if we do that. That might be but 2006 was a very different election. Many people who were going south took advantage of the fact they could vote in the advance poll. Therefore, I do not think it is a good benchmark to look at 2006.

• (1720)

The government talks about France having had 85% voter participation in the last election and that they vote on a Sunday and, therefore, that is a meritorious argument for this bill. I think it is a bit of a stretch to say that because they vote on Sundays in France and that they had an 85% voter turnout that somehow is the rationale for this bill. The reason is that it is a different political culture.

One of the things they have in France is a proportional system as well. We have spoken consistently from this side of the House, from the NDP's perspective, on the need, not just to have piecemeal change but to ensure that we change our voting structure so that it actually makes the system fair. Just to provide more time for people to vote, in and of itself, is not what really ails us right now. What really ails the body politic in Canada right now is having a fair vote so that someone's vote in Calgary counts as much as someone's vote in Prince Edward Island, in Toronto or in Timmins.

We know that a person, shall we say, wanting to vote Conservative in downtown Montreal, as we learned this past election, finds that their vote really is meaningless, other than the \$1.75 that might go to the Conservative Party. That was illustrated clearly after the last election when the government could not find a cabinet minister so it had to pluck one from the back room of the Conservative Party, pop him into the Senate and then hoist him into the cabinet. It was a sad day for democracy.

Government Orders

What we need instead of these piecemeal solutions that have been put forward by the government is substantive democratic reform. What we and the Citizens Assembly here in Ontario have proposed is to have a mixed member system, which is what the system the government is lauding in France has, and that is some proportionality. If the Conservative Party had won the election fair and square with a mixed member system, Mr. Fortier may have been a nominated candidate on its list and he could have been legitimately appointed to cabinet.

The same goes for the minister who crossed the floor from the Liberal Party and ended up in the cabinet of the Conservative Party. It was simply that the Prime Minister had no one from Vancouver. I do not know when the actual conversation took place but I suspect it was either right after the election or soon thereafter.

I underline those examples because what is wrong with our system right now are the floor crossings and the appointments to the Senate and then into cabinet, which deepens the cynicism of the population. I would submit that is more problematic and more of a challenge to us as parliamentarians to increase voter participation, not these piecemeal approaches, as populace as they might be, if I may use that word, because young people, for instance, are not voting because they do not see their vote counting. It is not that they cannot find the time.

I should turn to the province of Manitoba where recently the people of Manitoba increased their voter participation. I think it was because the government opened up the opportunities to vote, as well as, hopefully, they had something to vote for. That should be looked at. Manitoba made voting polls more available to people. They did not do what the government is proposing. They actually made the advance polls very accessible. They were in shopping malls and in everyday places where people go. That is the kind of thing we should look at.

• (1725)

I do not think this idea of having an advance polling day on a Sunday will find favour with people from our faith communities. I have talked to people in my constituency and some of them, not all, believe that Sunday should not be a voting day. I think some people in other faiths would have the same concern if were on their Sabbath. That needs to be addressed as well.

What are the costs? The government has estimated it at \$37 million. How will we do this if the voting booths or the advanced polling booths are in churches? Will that affect the services of any given church? Has that been thought through? I would think not. Has the government consulted with people in the faith communities about this? I think not. It is obviously something that can be addressed at committee.

The last thing I want to talk a little bit about is what the government's agenda is on democratic reform. I have already mentioned the fact that the government has had some democratic reform ideas but, in many ways, they are a cover for its democratic deficits that it suffered from in the first days of government. I am speaking of the floor-crossing and the appointment of the public works minister to the Senate and into cabinet.

On the surface, one would think that a government that claims to want substantive democratic reform would actually consult.

I guess we will debate Bill C-56 at some time. It fell off the calendar recently. It was on the calendar, then I gather the Conservative leader from Ontario said a couple of things about it and then it disappeared off the calendar, but I will leave the government to respond to that. It is another bill on democratic reform.

What the government is trying to do with that bill is to change the formula on how seats are assigned after a census. Do members know who the government consulted on this? Did it consult the provinces? It consulted no one other than itself. The problem with that is that this has consequences for every province. The way the government has done it, in terms of the lack of consultation, it will divide people as opposed to bringing them together. What democratic reform should be is bringing people together to have more faith in the democratic system and the democratic institutions we have built.

The government is offside on its consultation on this bill and on Bill C-56. I saw this on Bill C-31 when we saw that our privacy would be compromised. Bill C-31 is in the Senate now but Canadians are surprised to find out that a bill that is supposed to deal with so-called voter fraud gives up their privacy by having their birthdates published on the voters' list and given to political parties for their benefit.

The government says one thing and does the other. It has some pieces that we can say are fine, but the government does not consult. It has missed, not only the boat on the practise of democratic reform in terms of accepting floor-crossers and putting people from the back room into the Senate and into cabinet, but it has not dealt with the one issue that Canadians want it to deal with, be they young, middle aged or older, and that is the fairness of our system so that when someone votes their vote counts.

The fundamental question for our party has to do with voter fairness and until we deal with voter fairness, all these other tinkering and piecemeal approaches are really secondary. They do not deal with the fundamental question.

When the minister talks about comparisons to Europe and other jurisdictions, he should look at the whole picture and not cherry-pick but, sadly, that is what the minister has done.

The Deputy Speaker: When the House returns to this matter the member for Ottawa Centre will have the floor and he will have six minutes left.

It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1730)

[English]

CONTROLLED DRUGS AND SUBSTANCES ACT

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC) moved that Bill C-428, An Act to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act (methamphetamine), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise today, as you have mentioned, on my private member's bill, which moves to address the terrible problem of methamphetamines, or crystal meth, in many of our communities.

The devastation this drug inflicts on communities, families and others across this nation is horrific. The war is on. Quite frankly, we are losing the battle. Too many of our young, healthy citizens are losing years of their life to its devastation and some are dying in the grips of its horror.

Crystal meth is one of the biggest threats to some of our communities. Unfortunately, its popularity is increasing dramatically. Crystal meth has a hold on too many of our young citizens and we have a responsibility to do something about it.

This bill addresses the precursors of the production and trafficking of methamphetamines by amending the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. This will give the police the tools they need to combat the spread and the production of this drug. This is a vital change to the current legislation. It is my prayer that this will turn the tide on the war against this drug.

However, before we go any further, let us not forget what is at the core of this issue. This issue is about people. This bill is about people. I am going to begin by talking about a heartbreaking account from my riding of the devastating consequences of this drug.

I would like to start by relating the story of a victim of this drug in my riding of Peace River. She lives near my community. For now, I am going to call her Sally. There is nothing sadder than meeting a person I once knew as a strong and upstanding member of the community who was a successful businesswoman, a mother, and a wife for 15 years, but who is now a prostitute addicted to crystal meth.

She did not become a prostitute by choice. She was forced into prostitution to pay the debts that she incurred as a meth user. Sally never set out to become a drug-addicted prostitute, but that is the way that things have lined up for her.

It only took one use, one hit, and as well, her husband was an addict. "Her husband?", one might ask. We might have thought that Sally was the addict. She is, but this drug destroys entire families, and Sally's husband is the one who brought it home.

Who knows why she started? It seems that many partners, spouses, siblings, children, neighbours, classmates, colleagues and acquaintances cannot say no when someone close to them is a user. In a moment of weakness Sally got high and now her life is a mess. Even if she cleans up this mess, the sacrifices that she has made are already too high.

Private Members' Business

It only takes once. One use, and many people are hooked for life. The addictive qualities of methamphetamine make it a dangerous drug for any person to experiment with. To quote a participant from my home province in a consultation on this drug, "No human being should be putting fertilizer, iodine, Drano and battery acid, all mixed together with a little ephedrine, into their system". But that is in fact what people are doing.

People who have used this drug says that it gives them an overwhelming sense of euphoria, lasting up to 24 hours. It allows them to stay awake for hours on end. Some people claim that it helps them concentrate and gives them confidence and supernatural power. Unfortunately, the reality is that this drug offers only short term satisfaction, but long term destruction.

Unlike other drugs, methamphetamines do not need to be imported or grown. They can be produced relatively easily, and unfortunately relatively cheaply, right here in our communities in undercover labs that are often hard to detect.

I would like to commend the work that was recently done in my home province of Alberta by the premier's task force on crystal meth. It was chaired by Dr. Colleen Klein and Dr. Bob Westbury. The task force oversaw the development of a province-wide holistic strategy to find solutions to stop the abuse and the negative impacts of crystal meth and methamphetamines on Alberta families, young people, communities and workplaces. I will be quoting from that report tonight, among other sources.

Unfortunately, no province in Canada is safe from crystal meth, be it Alberta or on the east coast as well. Crystal meth is a highly addictive drug with a long-lasting high and it produces a sense of overwhelming euphoria. Those who use it quickly become addicted and, compared to other drugs, experience more intense effects from prolonged use.

The use and abuse of crystal meth is on the rise throughout Canada. Its prevalence is growing as dealers find new ways to target potential users and new ways to sell this drug. It is in our communities and our schools, our families are being affected by it, and it is in our workplaces.

• (1735)

This drug can affect anybody. It can affect the rich, the poor, the young and the old. It affects men and women equally. However, its use unfortunately is growing most quickly among young people and groups that are already at high risk.

The menace of crystal meth in our communities from coast to coast is real and acute. Our nation must fight back.

Before we understand how to fight back against crystal meth, it is important that we understand what it is. I know that one of my colleagues plans to outline this as well, so I will be brief.

Private Members' Business

I think it is important to know that methamphetamine is a stimulant. It is a derivative of a synthetic stimulant first produced in 1919. It is sold on the street as jib, crank, meth, speed, glass, fire, and ice and has other street names as well.

Meth is available as a powder. It can be taken orally, snorted or injected. Typically the drug is heated and vaporized and the fumes are inhaled, allowing the drug to enter the bloodstream very rapidly. It only takes about eight seconds for the drug to enter a person's brain. Crystal meth is smokable and this makes it the most potent form of the drug. For that reason, many young people are tending to gravitate towards it.

Methamphetamines are not legally available in Canada, but the drug can be produced virtually anywhere, including in small sheds, in basements and even in mobile labs in the back of a car or a trailer. These makeshift laboratories are extremely dangerous due to the presence of highly flammable liquids and corrosive chemicals, usually mixed by people with no experience or expertise in handling such dangerous goods.

The majority of meth sold on the streets is produced in undercover super-labs, which can produce 10 pounds or more, and the mid-level labs, which produce less than nine pounds at a time. These labs are often referred to by police as clandestine labs.

While there is a large number of small scale labs, they produce only 5% of the meth available on the streets. The small scale or home based labs, often operated by meth users themselves, produce one ounce at a time, often just enough for the user with just a small amount available that they can sell to cover the cost of their addiction.

Meth is relatively easy and inexpensive to make using commonly available ingredients called precursor chemicals. The recipe for meth includes products such as over the counter cold medications, paint thinners, household products like drain cleaner, and agricultural chemicals such as anhydrous ammonia.

Relative to other drugs, crystal meth is cheap to buy, making it more accessible to children and youth. Meth is not always the drug of choice for youth addicted to drugs, but if it is available they often will choose it. Meth is referred to as the poor man's cocaine.

The effects of crystal meth on the user include: rapid, unhealthy weight loss; brain damage; insomnia and restlessness; skin sores caused by repetitive scratching and picking; major dental problems; memory problems and an inability to focus; severe depression and suicidal thoughts; strong physiological withdrawal; a greatly increased risk of HIV, hepatitis C and other diseases if the drug is injected; long term damage to nerve endings; and a risk of severe injury or death in the case of an overdose.

The damage caused by meth is rampant and far-reaching. It is not isolated to the user. It extends to family members, friends and, quite frankly, the broader community. The impacts on the users are well known and include: significant family disruption; mistrust; difficulty for family members coping with other members' addictions; conflict with schoolmates, teachers, colleagues and bosses that may result in school expulsion and/or loss of employment; and harm to the community through violence, property crimes and environmental damage.

Producing crystal meth has potentially serious and deadly consequences for the community. The hazards of meth labs include: exposure to precursor chemicals, toxic fumes, poisonous gas, fires and explosives, and property damage caused by contamination.

Crystal meth production also poses a significant risk to the environment. Production of crystal meth is dangerous for the individuals who make it, for the people who try to shut down those labs, for the innocent neighbours of the labs, for the users, and for our natural environment as well.

● (1740)

Because of the various chemicals used to make crystal meth and the rudimentary processes that are used, the result is a tremendous amount of toxic waste. Half a kilogram of meth produces four kilograms of toxic chemical waste. In most cases, the waste and residue from meth labs end up in the surrounding environment, leading to major environmental damage and significant cleanup costs.

The chemical waste can also cause severe damage to the ecosystem and serious health problems if it is inhaled or ingested by people or animals. Since meth labs can produce drugs in relatively short periods of time, production labs can easily materialize in unexpected places such as hotel rooms, abandoned rural buildings or anyone's home.

As quickly as a lab is constructed, the drugs can be removed, leaving the lab and the waste to be discovered by somebody who comes by later. Unfortunately, the landowners, and often the municipal districts, are left shouldering the cleanup costs. In fact, one Alberta county was recently caught off guard with a significant cleanup bill from methamphetamine waste that was dumped on county lands.

Individuals who become meth users are addicted more quickly and experience much worse effects, compared to other drugs, after prolonged use. The negative impacts kick in quickly and are devastating.

I will read for members another account of a person who was addicted to methamphetamine. That user wrote: "Meth addiction is cunning and baffling. It starts out as a harmless and fun thing to do, and then, before you know it, your whole life becomes centred on it and it gets to the point where you can't imagine life without it. But you're unable to live with it".

We must ask this question: who is using crystal meth? This drug is particularly alarming because it is highly addictive, easily accessible and cheap to buy. These factors make it very attractive to young people.

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Most meth users tend to use other drugs as well. They may also use ecstasy, marijuana or other drugs at the same time. The burden of mental and physical illness associated with drug use rises when multiple drugs are taken.

Meth users tend to be between the ages of 10 and 25. However, meth is also used by adults over the age of 25. That is quite common.

Not all meth users are street youth and homeless adults. Many users start out living at home, attending school or holding down a job, but end up living on the street and in all kinds of places as the addiction progresses. Some, like Sally, are far from the typical image of a drug addict that most of us have in our minds.

One frightening fact is that some children, youth and young adults are being exposed to meth and they do not even know it. More and more drug producers are adding meth to other drugs because it is inexpensive and it gives other drugs greater addictive qualities. Police in Alberta estimate that about 70% to 75% of the ecstasy sold on the street contains methamphetamine.

The expansion of more clandestine and large scale production labs has the potential to increase availability and lower prices, which could ultimately result in a larger number of users.

Not only does meth affect individual lives, relationships and families, but it also has a dramatic impact on the communities in which it is produced and used.

Meth has followed a somewhat fractured path in invading Alberta communities. I know it is the same across the country. Some communities in the province have yet to witness the impact of meth on their streets and in their schools, but other communities have been hit hard and are being forced to join together to fight back.

It is time to get tough on crystal meth. That is what this bill does. We need to take steps to keep this drug off the streets by making it more difficult to produce and more difficult to sell. We need to get tough on drug dealers and drug producers by supporting police, law enforcement, and first responders.

Law enforcement has two important roles in addressing drug crimes: enforcing current laws and reducing the demand for drugs. It needs to have the resources and the tools to deter manufacturers and dealers while mobilizing communities, allies and young people to stop the spread of drugs and the drug culture in our communities.

Unfortunately, crystal meth is already available on our streets.

• (1745)

Most precursors, the chemicals necessary to make crystal meth, are available to anybody in small quantities in local stores. We also know that meth culture is quite closed and it is difficult for police to trace a dealer on the streets back to the person making the meth, known as the cook.

The government must get tough on drug producers and dealers to put an end to the pain and injury they cause children, youth, young adults, families and communities.

The devastation—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry, but I have to cut the member off. The member's 15 minutes are up. We do not have a lot of flexibility in private members' business.

The hon. member for Edmonton—Sherwood Park.

Mr. Ken Epp (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the seconder of this bill, I am very interested in it. We have had the same kind of experience in my riding as the member has talked about. I have attended a number of sessions where some of the leaders in our community have tried to address this problem and come up with some solutions.

I would like the hon. member for Peace River, who is bringing forward this bill, to please enlarge on what he was saying. Perhaps this would give the member an opportunity to add another minute or so to his speech before he was cut off.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to point out, as I was closing and finishing off, that in fact aboriginal communities in my riding have also experienced the horrific effects of crystal meth. I have been working with aboriginal communities in my riding. Also, throughout the country, the government has spoken to aboriginal communities, different municipalities, that are trying to find ways to combat this. Of course, it is multi-pronged.

What we as federal legislators can do is ensure that we can stop the production and distribution where it starts, so young people, families and communities do not have to continue to live through the devastation this drug forces on them.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I think this bill is an appropriate one and I wish to acknowledge the work the hon. member for Peace River has done.

I have a question and it may be technical. A concern I have is with regard to the penalty provisions that would apply to these offences. I do not think section 7, as it is now, is applicable. I am wondering if the member has addressed his mind to the types of penalties and where one would look, whether in the Criminal Code or in the bill, to what the penalties would be for these offences.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Mr. Speaker, it is my intent that the penalties would be in line with any other penalty, basically, within the act. They would be applied, basically, with penalties for anybody who was going to traffic drugs. If there was an intent to produce, the penalty would be the same as if one was going to bring a drug in.

A unique thing about crystal meth, of course, is the fact that it can be produced locally, so there is no way police are able to catch this in either the growing process, like they are able to do with some other drugs, specifically marijuana, and they would not be able to cut it off in terms of the influence.

We are asking that the police have the tools, once they see somebody and can prove there is an intent to produce crystal meth or methamphetamines with the precursors. These individuals would have the same type of penalty as if they were bringing in a drug from a different location.

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Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a similar problem in part of my riding in Surrey and Delta. I would like to congratulate the hon. member for Peace River for bringing this legislation forward. Has the hon. member given any thought or looked at how the bill would affect individual rights and charter issues?

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Mr. Speaker, yes, we did look very closely at individual rights. Obviously, the government wants to ensure that everybody understands it is looking for a provision, so that before the people who are investigating can charge anybody who is making or thinking they might produce crystal meth, it has to be proven there was an intent to produce with the chemicals and the precursors, wherever the drug was being made.

Obviously, the provision is to ensure nobody is inappropriately targeted because one happens to be buying cough syrup or something of that nature. Certainly, the intent to produce is essential. It is the provision that ensures nobody is tracked down without the intent.

● (1750)

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to rise in the House today to speak to this bill. While we may differ in our perspective on many issues, I believe my colleague and my batchmate across the floor is on the right track with this legislation.

There are many factors that contribute to drug abuse. These are factors that are only made worse when we tear away at social safety nets and govern by tax reduction, as this government is only all too ready to do. The fact is we have to do something and do something fast to fight the disease of crystal meth in our communities.

It was not that long ago that a study of schools in the Surrey and Delta area revealed that 9% of high school students had used this drug. I have two daughters who are old enough to be exposed to it. There are 13 year olds who are addicted to this drug.

Addiction to crystal meth is devastating. The damage it does to young minds makes recovery a long, hard road back to health. Heart, lung and brain damage are all too common. To watch this happen to our young people and not do all we can to prevent this devastation is to sacrifice their futures and the futures of our communities across this country. I believe it is that serious.

To make things worse, if that is possible, it also has a direct effect on other crimes. In my area, the police estimate that at least 70% of all auto theft is carried out by those who are chronic crystal meth users. That is just auto theft. Who knows how much other crimes can be connected to this terrible drug?

It was just last week that I sat down at an annual breakfast for the Surrey Food Bank, a great community organization which has become an essential service. Although I have all the respect in the world for those who do such great work in Surrey and Delta and such compassionate work in that area, including the executive director of the Surrey Food Bank, Marilyn Hermann, I wish it was not essential.

There are too many people struggling, what we now call the working poor, many who are desperate because they cannot feed their children. One gentleman at this breakfast bravely spoke about

considering crime to feed his own. If the working poor are facing these kinds of challenges, the temptation to break the law must be just as great when they are in the grip of a drug that is controlling their lives.

The choice is clear. I believe we have to put aside partisan politics on this one and stand up for our communities and for our children. When we look at the text of this bill, that it proposes to stamp out the substances as well as the equipment and all the materials that go into producing the drug, this may greatly help along an initiative in my riding.

Surrey Fire Chief Len Garis has to be commended for taking the lead on an approach which asks retailers not to sell large quantities of substances and materials that go into creating crystal meth. He also is proposing regular inspections of locations where meth might be produced and instructing garbage crews to look for signs of potential meth labs.

All of these approaches may yield good results. Washington State has cut the number of meth labs in half with the very same methods. However, if these kinds of strategies can be put forth at the municipal level, surely we can look to our federal government for the right kind of leadership and guidance on this urgent issue.

Government can be a force of good here. The federal government can help to make the work of our police forces and our fire departments that much easier by standing with them and by giving them the authority to do the right thing for our communities.

● (1755)

I could easily see a law of this kind being a big help to bolster the Surrey crime prevention strategy. This innovative approach, just introduced this spring in my riding, calls for all three levels of government and community stakeholders to kickstart proactive approaches on crime prevention. It is the only one of its kind in Canada. It will help redefine crime fighting across the country. A law like this will give it the added weight to get things done.

That being said, there are important details to be worked out with this legislation. As I said earlier, we have to make sure that individual rights are protected. We do not want to play fast and loose with charter issues, as the government has done in the past with justice bills.

What we will need to do is develop a real spirit of cooperation with all parties. It is the kind of dialogue and cooperation the government is so unwilling to engage in that it has to write a book on obstructing committee business then distribute it to its caucus. Perhaps Conservatives feel it is not to their advantage to get things done on crime when other parties are involved in the decision making. They would rather stall on legislation and use it for strategic purposes.

Meanwhile, communities like mine are wondering why Ottawa is so ineffective on crime. That is not good enough for my community, as I am sure it is not for my colleague across the floor who introduced this bill.

Beyond the rhetoric by the government of Liberals being “soft on crime”, we have tried to move forward on seven of nine justice bills with the same spirit of cooperation and sense of urgency that I feel this issue deserves. We know that real crime prevention requires all levels of government working together, never mind all parties.

We know that, contrary to how the government works, less federal vision and leadership does not mean more for Canadians. We know that our communities are the very definition of Canada and that we must do all we can to stamp out drug abuse because the effects can be devastating that it will ruin generations to come. So let us do the right thing here.

I only wish this good government would take the same kind of activist role on other issues besides crime. I wish it could speak up for communities on child care, Status of Women funding and the court challenges program. All of these would take real leadership, not a narrow, meanspirited vision of Canada that prefers to govern by tax reduction.

Let us give our communities the support they need, let us say to our police officers, fire departments and schools that we take the problem of crystal meth as seriously as they do and let us work together to get this legislation done right.

● (1800)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Québec has the floor.

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: Mr. Speaker, I hope that the members will listen to what I have to say and stop shouting while a member is talking in this House. It is the ethical and polite thing to do. It is improper to shout while someone else is talking. I would ask my colleagues to settle down.

I would first like to say that the Bloc Québécois recognizes that methamphetamine use is a serious problem. We are well aware that traffic in methamphetamine poses a danger to adolescents, particularly those between 14 and 16. We are well aware of the problem. Young people are taking drugs that can have very serious consequences for their health. That is why the Bloc Québécois supports Bill C-428 in principle. However, the Bloc has some concerns about how this bill fits in with the existing legislation.

The Bloc Québécois believes it would be a good idea to invite submissions from stakeholders such as police officers, front-line workers, pharmacists from Alberta and anyone else who is affected by this scourge. It is very dangerous for people to take these drugs. Certain methamphetamine derivatives are labelled as being extremely hazardous to human health. We would also like to examine further the applicability of certain measures the bill would impose, in order to answer some questions. The question we have is this: can we ask retailers to restrict access to ingredients other than over-the-

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counter cough, cold and allergy medications containing pseudoephedrine and ephedrine?

It is very easy to produce crystal meth, tina or ice. They are derivatives of methamphetamine. These substances have very serious repercussions on the health of young adolescents. Furthermore, in the United States, 12 million Americans have taken some form of this substance. Users very commonly become addicted to the drug, which has even replaced cocaine. One dose is relatively inexpensive, only \$5 or \$10, compared to cocaine, which is very expensive. This is why adolescents are so drawn to this euphoria-inducing substance. Some adolescents are less sensitive to the irreversible effects of the drug on their health. Young adolescents seem to think that it is like energy drinks or wake-up pills, which allow the user to stay awake for long periods. These substances are very harmful to one's health.

Thus, the Bloc Québécois will support this bill. We would like to see it studied in committee in order to be able to assess the overall problem in Canada. In the United States, in New York and Illinois, there are clandestine laboratories that produce the substance safely, but it is dangerous to the health of our children. It can also be made at home. One only has to go to the hardware store and purchase some solvent, some Drano, some lithium. All these products are available over the counter.

However, the bill goes perhaps a little too far. Can we prohibit the over-the-counter sale of certain products, such as ephedrine, which is found in cough medicine? We will see how far we want to go with this bill. Controls are used to prevent access to illicit drugs. We are talking about an explosive cocktail that can lead to illnesses such as Parkinson's disease. Tests have also been conducted on certain animals that experienced after-effects after consuming this type of substance.

● (1805)

If it can kill animals, imagine what it can do to human beings. People can become schizophrenic. They might even commit suicide. Some newspapers have reported several cases of suicide among 12- and 13-year-olds. Apparently, crystal meth keeps them high not for 20 minutes, but for hours and hours. Peach is also a much more concentrated derivative of these products.

The Bloc Québécois is aware of this problem. I mentioned the United States, but this is also a problem in Canada, especially in Vancouver. Our colleague who raised the subject in this House today says he is especially concerned about this issue because teenagers in his own province are using these drugs, which are freely available.

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We know this problem is affecting Quebec too, in places like Rivière-du-Loup. Young people are not the only ones using, although some start as young as 12 or 13. People who use this stuff for the first time might not think that they can become addicted, and that is the problem. They do not use it just once. They use it several times and develop a strong addiction. Users want to forget reality, which is sometimes tough to cope with, or they want to get through difficult situations. For example, for people who are shy or have trouble expressing themselves, these drugs make them feel big and strong, like Superman, and they lose their inhibitions when they are high. But using has serious consequences.

This bill will probably be referred to committee if my colleagues vote for it. However, as I said, we have concerns about the practicality of this bill. We cannot restrict the sale of the products that are used to make crystal meth.

I therefore invite my colleagues to at least think about this scourge. It is a very serious problem when young people of 12 and 13 have easy access to substances that are hazardous to their health. Users are not just delinquents; often they are adolescents from good families who have been influenced by their friends, kids who use drugs because everyone in their circle is doing it.

Referring the bill to a committee would provide an opportunity to gauge the extent of the problem in different provinces where methamphetamine is freely available and where there are clandestine laboratories. That might lead to further discussion of denunciation. When we know that the problem is all around us and we have adolescents, we all have a role to play in denouncing clandestine labs.

Moreover, this drug appears to be very easy to obtain. You just have to know where to go. I will not say where, but adolescents apparently know where to go. For example, methamphetamine is very easy to come by among skateboarders.

The Bloc Québécois will initially vote in favour of this bill. As for the applicability of the whole bill, we will consider amending it and making more appropriate proposals in connection with what is already in the legislation.

• (1810)

[English]

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier, I want to acknowledge the work that has been done by the member for Peace River in bringing forth this piece of legislation in the form of a private member's bill. It is one that addresses a current and very serious problem in the country.

As the House knows, as it is a private member's bill all members of the House are entitled to vote as they wish, but as the critic for my party, I will be recommending support for the bill at second reading and that it go to the justice committee. Having said that, I do have some concerns with it, some of which I have discussed with the member for Peace River. I feel fairly optimistic that we can resolve them.

Let me address those. They take two forms. One is that the creation of this new offence, which is in proposed section 7.1(a) may capture potentially individuals or even companies that we may not want to. We may have to look closely at that wording where it talks

about the intended use of the chemical or the equipment used in the production of methamphetamine.

That is one area. It is a bit technical but I can see a potential abuse of the legislation if it catches the wrong people. It may need to be tightened up because it may produce a defence for individuals guilty of criminal conduct but who would have a defence in that the language is somewhat vague. We will have to spend some time at committee to make sure that it is not the case and if it is, see what we can do to improve the language.

The second concern I have is the lack of a specific penalty in the section. Section 7(1) of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act as it is now prohibits the production of many drugs listed in other parts of the legislation. That section does not address the issue of equipment or material that is used in the production of the particular drug, in this case methamphetamine.

Maybe it would have been better to create a whole new section of the act, a section 8. In any event the problem is that the balance of section 7 as it is now in the act deals with penalties, but it does not deal with any penalties with regard to equipment or material used in the production of the drug. It only talks about substances.

The law as it is now would not cover part of what we are trying to prohibit in the way of both equipment or other material. It will need an amendment to deal with penalties.

There is another concern I have, although I think I have pretty well satisfied myself, but I will raise it at this point and we will probably have more discussion in committee, assuming the bill is passed in the House at second reading. Clearly, the member for Peace River is after—I do not want to presume guilt—individuals or groups who may very well be part of organized crime or have attachment to organized crime, because they are the greatest number of individuals or groups who are producing methamphetamine in this country at this time. By and large overwhelmingly they produce it and then distribute it, as we have heard from members from the other three parties, primarily to the youth in this country.

We have also heard, and I have not addressed it because so many other members have very accurately and in some cases passionately addressed the consequences of this distribution by these groups, by organized crime in particular. The penalty may need to take that into account. We may be able to put in a specific penalty and then fall back on other sections in the Criminal Code with regard to organized crime. I want to do more thinking on that. I want to hear from the justice department in that regard.

• (1815)

However, the point that I am making is this. For individuals who are long-time criminals with lengthy histories of criminal activity, specifically if they are in organized crime, whether they have criminal records or not, we would want more severe penalties with regard to their conduct. They are really the ones we are after to try to stop this scourge.

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In spite of the very debilitating effect that methamphetamine has on individuals who have become addicted to it, it is a reasonably well known fact that there are occasions where because they are so addicted to it and desperate for it, but are still functioning in a reasonably capable manner, they produce the methamphetamine for their own use. In that case we would want a separate penalty for them, which I think would have great emphasis with regard to treatment to try to get them off the drug.

The other penalty that needs to be addressed, and again I have spoken to the member for Peace River about this, is with regard to equipment and material used in the production of the drug. We want to give the courts authority to confiscate the equipment, and that would come from an application from the crown prosecutor. This additional power would allow our judiciary to adequately deal with these labs, especially the more sophisticated ones.

I want to make two more points that are indirectly related.

We know from an experience in the United States that there are other ways of dealing with this. I am not in any way taking away from the importance of doing this because we need this legislation.

New York state, when it first confronted the use of methamphetamine in its jurisdiction, identified early on that it was very important to get at the chemicals, the precursors that are used in the production of this. We know that a number of these chemicals are sold over the counter, mostly in pharmacies but in grocery stores as well.

The state did two things. It regulated the ability to sell those. People who produced the methamphetamine would walk into a pharmacy and strip the shelves. The pharmacy would sell these chemicals to them and they would take out box loads. Obviously, it was much more than was needed for individual consumption, whether it was for a cold, or a flu or some other ailment. That has been regulated. Now pharmacies can only sell a limited number.

The other major problem the state of New York identified, and it is a problem we have in Canada and one that I am critical of the government for not acting on this, was big pharmaceutical companies were producing and selling substantially more of the precursors than they could imagine being possible for legal purposes.

Again, the state regulate that. It said that, historically, this was the amount of a certain chemical that was sold in its state, and two years ago it jumped by 100% or 1,000%. The state regulated that and all the company could bring into the state and sell was a certain amount. If the company's market expanded for legal purposes and it could justify it, the state would allow it to sell more.

That is a problem we have in Canada. The government has not acted on this. We have regulations that allow a company to do the same thing. The Department of Agriculture should be doing this, but it has not acted on it, in spite of recommendations from the RCMP and just about every major municipal police force in this country. We can be using the model from the state of New York. This would have a very positive effect on reducing the availability of this drug in our country.

The other point I want to make is this, and we know it from experience. The first time we saw this really develop was in the

northern parts of the prairie provinces. We are not quite sure why it happened. We think it is because it is cheap to buy these drugs. However, it has now spread across the country. There are treatment facilities that can respond when we identify this, particularly when our youth get into it. There are not enough of those available. Both provincial and federal governments need to address this issue and allow our youth, in particular, to get the treatment they need to get off this drug.

• (1820)

Again, we will do what we can to improve this bill at the justice committee, assuming that it gets there.

Mr. Art Hanger (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak in the House today to the bill put forward by my hon. friend from Peace River.

I believe the member for Peace River has introduced this bill in a very timely fashion as many of the items that are coming forward, when it comes to meth, are coming to the attention of the police and the lawmakers. It is unfortunate that on one side it takes a while to catch up with what is happening out on the street with a lot of drug pushers and the criminal element. However, I think we have an opportunity here to actually curb the growth of this particular drug. It is of great concern because of how it affects Canadians and I commend him for drawing this particular issue to the attention of this House.

Unlike other better known drugs of abuse, such as heroin, cocaine and marijuana, methamphetamine presents some unique challenges. It is a synthetic drug. It is not dependent on cultivation of a crop. Its production requires no specialized skill or training. Its precursor chemicals are relatively easy to obtain and inexpensive to purchase. These factors make production attractive to both the criminal trafficker and to the addicted user.

I should clarify when I specified that it requires no specified skill. In many of the smaller labs, it does not, but many super labs have suddenly popped up all over the country. It appears that some areas of the country are more subject to their growth than others and the chemicals are ordered in bulk container loads at a time. That, of course, poses another problem. Not only has this particular drug proliferated some areas of North America, it is being packaged in a way that is attractive to youngsters. A new sort of designer element to this particular drug, which is called strawberry quick, is that it is strawberry coloured and flavoured, and it is packaged in a way that youngsters might want to try it. It is a dangerous way to go but it is actually out there and it is happening in that fashion.

I know that this legislation may fall a bit short, as the member from Windsor has pointed out, but he is also very supportive of seeing something move ahead, which is the key issue.

Any piece of federal legislation needs to permit the domestic seizure and forfeiture of methamphetamine precursor chemicals. Therefore, the precursors, the stuff that this chemical is made up of, must come under a clear direction from legislation for the police to be able to seize it. The legislation should also direct the police and the attorney general to cooperate with international drug enforcement agencies to interdict such chemicals.

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When I say that these chemicals come from all over, they come from all over the world actually and they land on our shores, sometimes not even noted in bulk form but they are destined for, now, these super labs. Therefore, there is a need for this international cooperation to take place.

The bill also should increase penalties for the possession of equipment used to make controlled substances and for trafficking in certain precursor chemicals.

• (1825)

What kind of equipment is used? We could go to any lab that produces any kind of pharmaceutical actually and we would find equipment there that could be easily employed in these super labs. In fact some of them are almost like that. It would have to include anything that would go into lab work, whether it is a beaker or glass containers. Some of the smaller ones use makeshift equipment, glass tubing or plastic tubing and they need a lot of it.

Some of these labs are popping up in high-rise apartment buildings or the house next door. They pose a considerable hazard to the neighbourhood. If it is in an apartment, sometimes depending on what chemicals are used, toxic vapours are emitted. Those vapours can kill. After hearing from concerned neighbours, there have been labs that have been discovered in apartment buildings by police officers and all the occupants inside were dead. It is very, very dangerous. It could ignite and create an explosion, almost like a bomb, that damages neighbours and certainly injures those inside.

There is a need for law enforcement. The public should be made aware too. Herein lies the need for education. The public should be aware of what is happening around them as well. They should be the eyes and ears of the police. What should they look for? They should look for quantities of equipment like I have just described, or large barrels of chemicals going into a residence. These are items that are often used by organized criminals to create crystal meth.

Above all, because the distribution of crystal meth is such an international scourge, it requires a very strong link to other agencies worldwide. There has to be an agreement to interdict any such

chemicals and any such equipment if they are destined for certain places. Of course, agencies need to educate people and other countries. There is a growing need for an international approach to law enforcement.

If people think there is a crystal meth lab in their neighbourhood, the first thing to do is to approach the police, advise them that this could be a very toxic area and stay away from it. Police officers are now being trained to look after these situations.

We can talk about a lot of issues. I had the privilege of attending a crystal meth conference in the United States. I just came back last week. Mexico, Canada and the United States are coming together to combat this huge problem and they have certain successes. There are concerns about what is happening in Canada. There are concerns about what is happening in Mexico and of course in their own nation as well. They seek our cooperation as much as we seek theirs.

The human misery attached to the use of this drug is beyond words. For the young people who use it, one of the side effects is rapid tooth decay. They call it "meth mouth". They can have heart failure, kidney failure, brain damage, neurotoxicity, paranoia and depression. Some of these things are lasting. They cannot be fixed.

We have an obligation in the House to support this kind of an initiative, to make sure that it is workable in our courts, in our society, that police officers are directed to place this as a priority. I am pleased to hear there are a number of members in the House who will support this bill. We all do indeed look forward to seeing the bill in committee.

• (1830)

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

It being 6:30 p.m. this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:30 p.m.)

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