



CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 142 • NUMBER 050 • 2nd SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, February 13, 2008

—
Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

CONTENTS

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

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:

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

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, February 13, 2008

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

• (1405)

[*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*]

VISION IMPAIRED CURLING CHAMPIONSHIP

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to stand and salute the competitors of the 2008 Canadian Vision Impaired Curling Championship, which took place last week here in Ottawa.

I am proud to announce that Team Canada, represented by the Kelowna rink, remained undefeated, winning its fourth consecutive championship.

Dean Martell, Bob Comba, Frank Costello and Sandy Neddow and dedicated coaches Janet Dyck and Barb Hansen-Comba are great ambassadors for Canada and the sport of vision impaired curling. They will make us proud as they go on to compete at the world championship later this year.

This is another success story for the city of Kelowna, which recently received special recognition from the Canada-wide Winter Lights Celebration, part of the popular Communities in Bloom program. Kelowna has received a five star rating as a four season city that all ages can enjoy at any time of the years.

We thank all the hard-working volunteers who made it happen.

I extend a warm welcome for all Canadians to come and enjoy our hospitality and discover for themselves why Kelowna is considered the jewel of the Okanagan.

EAST TIMOR

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on May 20, 2002, East Timor became the first new state of the 21st century, following a United Nations sponsored self-determination process in 1999.

Since 2002, East Timor has had to contend with political and social instability. Several days ago, President Jose Ramos-Horta, who was the recipient of the 1996 Nobel Peace Prize, and Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao were the victims of an assassination attempt. President Ramos-Horta continues to recover from serious injuries. I am sure I speak for all members of Parliament in wishing him a full and quick recovery.

As a young and struggling democracy, East Timor's people and government need support from the world community. There is much that we can do to help.

I encourage the government, and indeed all Canadians, to provide whatever support it can to assist East Timor's people and its government at this particularly difficult time.

* * *

[*Translation*]

ONIL ARCAND

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Société nationale des Québécoises et des Québécois d'Abitibi-Témiscamingue recently awarded its Prix d'honneur du citoyen d'Abitibi-Témiscamingue to Mr. Onil Arcand, a citizen in my riding.

This award is one of the most important given out annually by the Société nationale des Québécoises et des Québécois d'Abitibi-Témiscamingue in recognition of all the activities in which a citizen has engaged out of nationalist fervour and the leadership role he has played in advancing the cause.

For more than 25 years, Mr. Arcand has tirelessly put his talent and skills to work promoting and defending the cultural and linguistic interests of Quebec society.

I want to congratulate Mr. Arcand on his unfailing willingness to volunteer, on all he has achieved, and most especially on this award, which he richly deserves.

Statements by Members

[English]

CHILD CARE

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, children deserve a good head start in life. Quality child care supports early learning, an essential first step. It promotes and equalizes opportunities for all children, regardless of income or social background.

One in six Canadian children lives in poverty. More than 50% of single female parents are poor. Dependable affordable child care would improve the lives of these families.

The OECD says that the gender wage gap is the lowest in countries that provide public child care, like France and the Scandinavian countries. Most Canadian women with children under five work outside the home, yet less than 20% of Canadian children have access to regulated child care spaces. In fact, the OECD ranks Canada dead last among 14 countries when it comes to child care.

Previous governments failed to deliver, while cutting corporate taxes. The Conservative government's big tax cut for the banks and oil companies last fall could have created 320,000 child care spaces

• (1410)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Calgary East.

* * *

BURMA

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada was appalled by last September's violent crackdown by the Burmese regime on protestors exercising their right to peaceful dissent. This is why last November the government imposed the world's toughest sanctions against the Burmese regime.

The Burmese authorities have continued to arrest and detain those who participated in the protests. This January the regime charged 10 pro-democracy activists.

On Saturday, the Burmese regime announced its intention to hold a referendum on a new constitution in May, as well as general elections in 2010. However, Canada believes that an authentic dialogue with members of the democratic movement must occur if there is to be democratic reform in Burma.

We urge the Burmese regime to include all concerned parties in both the constitutional and electoral processes.

* * *

ST. JAMES LITERARY SOCIETY

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this year the St. James Literary Society of Montreal is celebrating its 110th anniversary season. A not for profit, non-sectarian, non-partisan organization providing prominent Canadians a forum to express their views on current issues, the society has played a key role in spreading democratic ideas.

To date, there have been roughly 1,000 different speakers. The likes of Stephen Leacock, Vincent Massey, Wilder Penfield and Antonine Maillet have lived the society's motto of *Permitte Lucem*, sharing the light of knowledge.

On behalf of the House, I wish continued success to the St. James Literary Society of Montreal.

* * *

TACKLING VIOLENT CRIME ACT

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC): Mr. Speaker, from the website of Mothers Against Drunk Driving, in a mother's words, I quote:

It's over. You leave the hospital...the sun is shining...people are walking and talking like nothing has changed...it's time to go home...there are things to do... people to call...a funeral to arrange...a son to bury.

In response, last week I had the privilege of thanking over 200 volunteers from Operation Red Nose Quinte. Driving 15 nights, they took well over 2,000 people home safely, earning them the honour of number one in all of Ontario in keeping our streets safe from impaired drivers. I say well done.

Our government has introduced the tackling violent crime act in part to protect the lives of innocent people from those who drive under the influence of drugs and alcohol. The opposition leader should stop the stall tactics and tell his Liberal senator friends that this delay is unacceptable. Instead of walking out on victims of crime, try voting for the safety and security of Canadians.

* * *

[Translation]

QUEBEC FILM FESTIVAL

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the successive governments in the House have had difficulty recognizing the existence of a Quebec cinema. When a minister manages to say the words Quebec cinema at all, he speaks as if it were a sub-genre of Canadian francophone cinema in general.

I would like to invite the hon. members, therefore, to the Rendez-vous du cinéma québécois, which will be held February 14 to 28. They will see how right we are to say that through its feature and short films, its documentaries and its animated films, our cinema is the reflection of our culture. They will discover that although Quebec cinema is mainly francophone, it can be anglophone and aboriginal as well. The films shown this year were selected from a record number of 550 and are very representative of the filmmakers in our movie industry, who do not sit around waiting to be recognized by some Canadian government.

For 26 years, the Rendez-vous du cinéma québécois has lent expression to life in Quebec and Quebec culture. Long live Quebec cinema.

* * *

THE BLOC QUÉBÉCOIS

Mr. Denis Lebel (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very grateful to Denis Gauthier, a constituent of mine from Saint-Félicien, for the clear-eyed description he gave yesterday of the ineffectiveness of the Bloc's political actions. He said:

If the members of the Bloc Québécois truly wanted to do something, they would close up shop and head to a party that can take power. Then they could really talk and work on behalf of Quebecers, instead of howling at the moon just to prove they exist.

The Bloc can very well try to disguise its powerlessness, but the reality is this: even Pierre Curzi, from the head office, told the magazine *L'Actualité* in March 2007 that whether they like it or not, they need to be in power in order to solve problems.

The fact is that our constituents know that the Conservatives are responsible for Quebec growing stronger within a united Canada because we say what we do and do what we say. All the Bloc can do is talk.

* * *

• (1415)

[English]

DIPLOMATIC REPRESENTATIVES

Mr. Glen Pearson (London North Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week I had the privilege of attending the NATO meetings with the defence minister in Lithuania, and I was fortunate enough to attend various venues with our ambassador, Claire Poulin. Her professionalism and personal charm were apparent for all to see.

I also visited the office of our micro-mission in Vilnius, headed by Habib Massoud. Meeting the dedicated staff was indeed an honour. With limited resources, these individuals have done work far and above what is asked of them.

We often get wrapped up in domestic politics in the House, but occasionally it does us good to recall what a key role our diplomatic representatives play around the world and how they do Canada proud in the midst of great challenges. We must simply do a better job of expressing our appreciation for remarkable work well done abroad.

For our people in Vilnius and specifically Ambassador Poulin, our sincerest appreciation for representing our country in the highest possible fashion.

* * *

[Translation]

JUSTIN TRUDEAU

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in Edmonton on Monday the Liberal Party's star candidate, Justin Trudeau, once again insulted 22 million unilingual Canadians when he stated at a teachers' conference that people who do not learn a second language are "lazy".

Some people learn a second language in their spare time, others spend time at their hobbies, and others do volunteer work or simply work at their jobs. It is incredibly elitist and arrogant for the privileged son of a former prime minister to suggest that people are "lazy" because they have not had the same opportunity he had to learn a second language.

This is not the first time that Justin Trudeau has insulted Canadians on the question of languages. In May 2007, Mr. Trudeau questioned the right of francophones to have their own school system in New Brunswick.

Statements by Members

Justin Trudeau's comments show how divorced from reality the Liberals may have become. It is time for the Liberal leader to rein in his star candidate's impulses before he insults more Canadians.

* * *

[English]

HEALTH

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the residents of Princeton are extremely concerned about the health care crisis currently facing their community, with the loss of three positions by the end of April and, in addition, the closure of their hospital's emergency room.

It is estimated that five million Canadians currently do not have a family physician, and 4,000 more doctors are expected to retire within the next two years.

The residents of Princeton and other rural communities deserve to have access to doctors and to emergency services. The mayor and council, together with the Interior Health Authority, are working hard to address the situation.

Something is wrong here. Massive cuts to health care transfers, together with a lack of leadership at the federal level, have shifted the burden onto provinces and communities. In B.C., the provincial government chose to cut and slash the health care system at the same time that it implemented massive tax cuts.

It is time for the federal government to assume its responsibility to ensure that towns like Princeton have enough health care professionals and adequate hospital facilities. Canadians deserve no less.

* * *

LOUIS RIEL DAY

Hon. Raymond Simard (Saint Boniface, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, these words were spoken by a famous Canadian in 1885:

I am more convinced every day that without a single exception I did right. And I have always believed that, as I have acted honestly, the time will come when the people of Canada will see and acknowledge it.

Louis Riel has been vindicated and has become the most written about personality in Canadian history.

The province of Manitoba has just recently recognized the third Monday in February as Louis Riel Day and has made it a statutory holiday.

[Translation]

Louis Riel is now recognized as the founder of Manitoba, and this Monday Manitobans will officially recognize his contribution by celebrating this day in his honour for the first time.

The body of this famous Canadian lies in a place of honour in the cemetery of the St. Boniface Cathedral. As the member for that wonderful riding, I am proud that his contribution is to be recognized in such a commendable way.

*Oral Questions***DEATH PENALTY**

Mrs. Carole Freeman (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on February 6 the House reaffirmed its opposition to the death penalty and called on the government to continue to make efforts on behalf of Canadian citizens sentenced to death in a foreign country. This government voted against that wish, with complete contempt for the traditional position in this matter.

I would point out that in 2001 the Supreme Court ruled that the death penalty is “cruel and unusual”. And yet the Conservatives have refused to appeal to the United States to ask that the death sentence given to a fellow Canadian citizen be commuted to a sentence of life in prison. In addition, they refused the invitation from the United Nations to sponsor a resolution calling for a moratorium on this cruel form of punishment.

We can only denounce the distressing direction taken by this Conservative government. Last Wednesday they clearly voted to turn the clock back 30 years.

* * *

• (1420)

[English]

LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if Elections Canada should allow the Liberal Party to go ahead with its auction bonanza this evening, it will have effectively repealed all of the legislation designed to control election finances in this country.

For example, endless donations could be accepted from corporate interests or individuals as long as those donations are called an auction. Alfonso Gagliano, Groupaction and other Liberal insiders will be allowed to give as much as they want as long as they are willing to suffer through seeing Bob Rae in tennis shorts, or are willing to have a lazy lunch with Justin Trudeau, as long as that lunch is in both official languages.

We know that nothing has changed in the Liberal Party. It continues to seek out every lobbyist, every insider and every go-getter in the city of Ottawa and across the country. The Liberals are up for sale. The more they change, the more things stay the same.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am glad that the Prime Minister is coming to the Liberal position on Afghanistan, but let—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Leader of the Opposition has the floor. We have to be able to hear the question.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: But let me check, Mr. Speaker. Will the Prime Minister confirm today that when the House debates the future of the mission in Afghanistan it will be based on the terms that we presented, including the critical need for much more competence,

transparency, accountability and, above all, honesty in the governance of the mission?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me be very clear. When the Liberal Party originated the mission in Afghanistan in 2001-02, the Conservative parties in opposition were pleased to support that effort. We have been strong supporters of the work that our development officers, our diplomats and of course our military personnel have been doing ever since then.

We have been absolutely clear and transparent in our unqualified support for the men and women in uniform who are doing this mission and we will continue to support them.

[Translation]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what is very clear is they did not have enough time when they were in the opposition to show Canadians how incompetent they are. They sure have been doing it though since coming to power.

I would like to turn now to another point. Yesterday the Prime Minister acknowledged the rotation principle. Finally he has got on the telephone to ask NATO for reinforcements, after spending a year denying that any were needed.

Can he assure the House that his negotiations with NATO are based on the rotation principle so that Canada can concentrate on a new security, training and reconstruction mission?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have explained to the House on several occasions that our positions are based on the bi-partisan report of the Manley panel appointed by the government. It recommended that the government should strengthen its security, development, and humanitarian efforts in Afghanistan.

We need to do all this in order to improve the situation, and the government will seek NATO assistance to that end. We will continue to support the efforts of our troops, our diplomats and our relief workers.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I must make things very clear for the Prime Minister: if there is going to be a bipartisan agreement, it will have to happen here in the House.

In order for there to be a bipartisan agreement, will the Prime Minister explain the 2011 deadline? Is it the end of the Canadian mission in Afghanistan or a recipe for a never-ending mission, for getting bogged down?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, like the Manley report, this government is very clear: we do not want a never-ending mission. We said as much in the Speech from the Throne.

We said in the throne speech that our intent was to end the mission in 2011. We said the same thing in our motion on the mission.

Oral Questions

Once again, I have told the opposition leader that the government will examine the Liberal proposals very carefully and respond to them.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday we made our position clear on Afghanistan, but it is the government's position that remains confused.

We say begin a training mission in 2009. The Conservatives say begin training later. When exactly?

We say end the military mission in 2011. They cannot make up their minds when.

We say there is no military solution in Afghanistan. They say stick with the status quo.

We have spoken clearly on Afghanistan. When will the Prime Minister begin to catch up?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think this government's and this party's support for the mission in Afghanistan has been clear from day one, when the Liberal Party first committed Canadian troops to the Afghan mission. We have been clear on that.

I think we are also clear in our motion, as is the Liberal Party, that the mission should continue beyond 2009, and we are both seeking an end to the mission around 2011. I noted before that the Liberal Party has proposed some very specific language in this regard. We are taking a careful look at that language.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party's position on Afghanistan is clear. The mission must evolve. The mission must end in 2011. Military solutions are no longer enough and national reconciliation in Afghanistan is essential. There is a definite difference between our position and that of the government.

Will the Prime Minister acknowledge that he has to reach out to us if he wants to find a reasonable and realistic solution?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member indicated that the Liberal Party wanted a mission that would train Afghan forces. We already said as much in the throne speech. In addition, in the Manley report, Mr. Manley and his colleagues documented government efforts to train Afghan troops, which were meeting with increasing success.

As I said yesterday, the Canadian public is not looking for a Conservative mission or a Liberal mission. It is looking for a Canadian mission and this government will work towards establishing this consensus.

* * *

THE BUDGET

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, Quebec's Minister of Finance, Monique Jérôme-Forget, lowered her economic growth forecast. She even talked about a possible recession. Meanwhile, the federal government is talking about spending the entire surplus—\$10.6 billion in 2007-08—on the debt. The Prime Minister certainly has the means to put \$3 billion

toward the debt—we agree with that—and to spend the rest on measures to help businesses, families, workers and the regions, as the Bloc Québécois has suggested.

Does the Prime Minister realize that Quebec's Minister of Finance has sounded the alarm, that he must act now, and that he has the means to do so?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I read Ms. Jérôme-Forget's statement. She expressed some concern about the uncertainty emanating from the American economy. Ms. Jérôme-Forget said that the Government of Quebec is determined not to have a deficit. That is also this government's policy.

I would like to congratulate the finance minister on his efforts to develop a balanced policy in order to avoid the deficit that the opposition parties are asking for.

• (1430)

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am not talking about a deficit. I am talking about the \$10.6 billion surplus for this fiscal year. I am not even talking about the next budget. I am talking about the multi-billion-dollar surplus in the current budget. We have \$10.6 billion, and everyone agrees that we should put \$3 billion of that toward the debt. I am talking about a balanced approach. Ms. Jérôme-Forget and the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters, with which I met yesterday, are asking for immediate measures to help the regions, businesses and workers right now.

The government has the means. Will it shake off its ideological yoke?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government's policy is balanced. I know that the Bloc and the other opposition parties always want to spend more. We are spending faster than the economy is growing, and we cannot continue to do that.

In last year's budget and the fall economic statement, this government said that it was determined to reduce taxes, invest in certain programs, and lower the debt. The House passed those measures.

* * *

MANUFACTURING AND FORESTRY INDUSTRIES

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Tembec recorded a loss of \$60 million in its first quarter and the Conservatives' tax cuts, which are lining the pockets of the oil and gas companies, will do nothing to help Tembec maintain its investments in research and development. Tembec's situation is a good illustration of the difficulties facing the manufacturing and forestry sectors.

Will the Minister of Finance finally realize that it takes more than tax cuts, that it takes other assistance measures such as a refundable tax credit for research and development, as called for by Tembec and the Forest Products Association of Canada?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what the hon. member is suggesting is that his party would run a deficit in 2008-09. It would have to be in government to do that.

We intend to continue to balance the budget, as we committed to do. We are going to continue to reduce the public debt. Every time we reduce the public debt, we reduce personal taxes in Canada by the tax back guarantee; that is, the interest saved on that public debt goes back to the people of Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, these numbers are from the minister and, every year, we have a surplus in the end. The government must try to stop spreading this misinformation.

Over the past five years, Quebec has lost approximately 150,000 manufacturing jobs, the majority since the Conservatives came to power. In 2007 alone, nearly 50,000 jobs were lost. The economic slowdown in the United States now extends to the service sector and Quebec's finance minister is even talking about a possible recession.

Will the Minister of Finance take the only responsible action in light of the deteriorating situation and put \$3.5 billion towards an assistance plan for the manufacturing and forestry sectors, especially considering the \$10.6 billion surplus expected this year?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, the proposals that come from the Bloc would mean that the government would run a deficit in 2008-09. The assumption is that there will be a \$10 billion surplus, at least, in 2008-09, which is unlikely. That means we would go back to the bad old days of running deficits and running up public debt in Canada. We are not going to do that.

* * *

*[Translation]***HEALTH**

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the 10th report card on cancer in Canada shows that Canadian patients are suffering under the Conservative government because of deficiencies in the system. Drug costs are on the rise. The costs to the public sector are doubling every three years. The Cancer Advocacy Coalition paints a disturbing picture: serious problems regarding standards, wait lists and access to drugs.

When will the Prime Minister make good on his so-called promise about wait lists? When?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have invested in the fight against cancer and the fight against wait times.

• (1435)

[English]

This government has invested in wait time reductions. It has invested through a unique partnership called the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer. This is the first instance in the history of this

country that there has been a national campaign with the federal government at the table to tackle cancer once and for all.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I remember a time in the last election when the Prime Minister was happy to talk about questions of health. In fact, he was going to make them a priority, but the answers we are getting right now are not good enough for Canadian families.

It certainly is not good enough for the fire marshal in New Westminster, who, at the Royal Columbian Hospital this morning, had to take the patients out of the waiting room because it was overcrowded. The ambulance attendants who bring people to that hospital now are forced to phone the nurse to see if there is any room. Guess what happens if there is not. They have to wait outside with their patients in the ambulances for the waiting list to wind down.

When is the Prime Minister going to tell Canadians what happened to his guarantee on wait times?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member is well aware, under the previous Liberal government, delays and wait times doubled in this country.

When we came to power, we were the first government to work with the provinces and territories to institute the first patient wait time guarantees in this country, putting the focus on the patient, making sure the patient has recourse in the system. We are proud of that innovation and it will mean better health care for Canadians across the country.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in 1993 the Liberals inherited a \$42 billion Conservative deficit and then cleaned up the mess.

In 2003 the finance minister was a top minister in a Conservative government that lied about a \$5.8 billion deficit, which Dalton McGuinty's Liberals then had to clean up.

How can the minister—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: The hon. member for Markham—Unionville has considerable experience and using the word “lied” does create disorder in the House and I would invite him to refrain from such conduct. He can use other words that implicate similar thoughts, but he does not need to use that kind of language.

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Speaker, how can the minister possibly deny, given his own sad record, that Tory times are tough times, Tory times are deficit times, and Canadians then turn to Liberals to fix up the mess?

Oral Questions

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unlike the member opposite, Tory times are balanced budget times in Canada. Tory times are paying down debt in Canada. Tory times are reducing taxes for individuals in Canada. Tory times are reducing the GST by two full percentage points. Tory times are supporting families in Canada. We did not do what the member's government did which was to reduce health and education sharing with the provinces. That is what the Liberals did to Canada.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. Perhaps we can all work to make question time quiet time.

The hon. member for Markham—Unionville has the floor.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, selective memory. Last year the economy created one private sector job for every four public sector jobs. If this continues for a decade, Canada will have one public sector worker for every two in the private sector. Big government job growth is economic Viagra for the NDP leader.

Why does the biggest spending finance minister in Canadian history not simply join the NDP and leave finance to someone who does not combine illegal contracts, economic incompetence, and just last night, tollgating at \$500 a head?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am not going to get into a debate with the hon. member on Viagra. It is something that he can consider in his own questioning.

Like the Bloc Québécois, the member for Markham—Unionville would increase spending by \$7 billion. That would mean a deficit for our country in 2008-09. That would mean we would be going back to the bad old days of big deficits by Liberal governments in Canada and not reducing taxes for Canadians and paying down public debt.

On jobs, more than three-quarter of a billion jobs have been created—

• (1440)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Kings—Hants.

* * *

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the loss of 1,200 auto jobs at Kitchener Frame was no surprise to the Prime Minister because he was warned of the coming manufacturing crisis last April when he met with Mike Devine, head of Kitchener Frame's UAW. The Prime Minister offered no help, just the cold words, "Can I put a plug in? We need tradesmen in Alberta".

Is this the Prime Minister's real manufacturing plan, that everyone who loses their job in manufacturing ought to just move to Alberta?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I point out to the hon. member that we are working together with the auto industry, together with Mr. Hargrove, other individuals in the industry to ensure that we continue to be good at what we have always been good at in this country, which is automobile assembly.

As I pointed out yesterday in the House, one out of every six automobiles in North America is assembled in this country. I point out for the edification of my friend that the largest automotive plant

closures that have happened in Canada happened in 2002, 2003, 2004 when there was a Liberal government which was not taking care of this industry.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the Prime Minister met with the union that represents the 1,200 workers who lost their jobs, he did not offer any plan or any assistance. He coldly told them that workers were needed in Alberta.

Is that the Prime Minister's real manufacturing plan: to send workers to Alberta?

[*English*]

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure the hon. member listened to my response, but the point is, I have had a number of meetings with Mr. Hargrove. We have a very positive working relationship. I do not doubt in any way his sincerity toward the auto industry, nor does he doubt ours.

The real question is why the former Liberal government at the time that it was in office did not deal with the issues. One example is the Windsor bridge crossing, a bridge constructed before the Great Depression. For 13 years, the former Liberal government did nothing about that and did not help the industry be competitive on a North American basis.

* * *

[*Translation*]

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first I would like to reiterate the Bloc Québécois position. Unlike the Liberals, the Bloc Québécois will not get into bed with the Conservative party over the Afghanistan mission. It has to end in 2009.

Until then, however, the soldiers need to have adequate equipment. As we speak, their safety is being compromised. We saw in the media that soldiers are ill-equipped, that their boots are not well suited for all the walking they have to do in Afghanistan and that there are not enough ammunition clips in their vests.

Does the government simply—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of National Defence.

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. Our government is always looking for ways to improve the equipment for soldiers deployed in the field in Afghanistan.

Oral Questions

Our government is now supplying the soldiers with the best equipment available in the world. We are always looking to improve the equipment.

I thank my colleague for his question because this is a very serious matter. Our government will continue to improve the equipment.

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am not talking about aircraft or armoured vehicles worth millions or billions of dollars, but basic equipment for infantry in a very violent area. And we do not just need to talk about their boots and the things I mentioned earlier. We also need to talk about their holsters. Even the holsters for their sidearms are poorly designed. The guns can fall out and seriously injure the soldiers, or even kill them.

This is not complicated. He must remedy this situation immediately.

•(1445)

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I understood the question.

[*English*]

Let me repeat for the hon. member. We are constantly in the process of upgrading equipment, including vests, holsters, boots, personal equipment of the soldiers, and testing new processes, new equipment with respect to Kevlar, the type of protection and location on the body. These tests are rigorously done continuously with the input of soldiers in the field, constantly keeping in mind the temperatures in Afghanistan and the type of weaponry that is in use in Afghanistan.

I appreciate the hon. member's interest. It is a serious one. The Government of Canada is very conscious of this effort and we continue to do our best to provide the best equipment in the world for our soldiers.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative minority government is trying once again to conceal information about the war in Afghanistan. On Monday, Radio-Canada reported that the Canadian army is aware of the presence of drug dealers but prefers to close its eyes, on the grounds that that is none of our business. According to the latest report from the United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention, opium production rose by 32% from 2006 to 2007 and is expected to continue to increase in 2008.

Can the Prime Minister show some transparency and stop hiding the truth? Is he—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are working with the Afghan government. The Afghan government has an anti-drug policy. With the international community, we are finding solutions to this problem, but we are also working with farmers to make sure they can grow other crops, in order to help them have a better future and be more in line with the position of the Afghan government.

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want a clear answer to my question. Colonel Anderson of the Canadian army admits all this. The Prime Minister cannot deny that there are drug

dealers near the fields where the Canadian army checkpoints are located. What is the truth?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said previously, awareness campaigns are under way to eradicate this problem in Afghanistan. I would like the Bloc Québécois to support our motion so that we can have a consensus in the House on the future of the Canadian mission in Afghanistan.

Why does the Bloc Québécois not want to support our soldiers? Why can the Bloc Québécois not support the humanitarian aid we are providing with the international community, under the UN? This is a noble mission, and I would like to have the support of the Bloc Québécois.

* * *

[*English*]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Paul Zed (Saint John, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is trying to hide the fact that it is doing nothing to help Canadian municipalities fund their \$123 billion infrastructure deficit.

The Conservatives' failing Canada fund contains \$18 billion in programs started by Liberal governments, and \$6 billion in programs for which municipalities cannot apply. They are calling Canada's mayors whiners and they are misleading them.

The cities say that they need money now. When will the government start treating our mayors with respect and start working with them as full partners?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if my hon. colleague insists on comparing data, I can tell him that from the period of 2002 to 2005, for instance, in the urban transit sector, the Liberals put \$46 million a year into it. Under our government, it is \$1 billion a year for urban transit.

Mr. Paul Zed (Saint John, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know the government's failing Canada fund is a shell game and a sham. It is killing Liberal infrastructure programs and it is bullying Canada's mayors. It tears the heart out of programs that work and then it demands praise for crumbs off the table.

We have heard the Conservative fairy tale and deception before with aboriginals, the environment, child care and housing, all its programs that are failing.

When will the government start to build? It is failing Canada and when will it end?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will give an example of the support we are getting from municipalities: on the Saint John harbour cleanup, \$26 million. The harbour cleanup is and has been the top priority for the common council and the citizens of Saint John.

Oral Questions

"I am very thankful for the support that the Government of Canada has announced today". Does the member know who said that? The Saint John mayor, Norm McFarlane.

• (1450)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is playing hide and seek with its Building Canada Fund, but Canada's infrastructures are falling apart. This morning, Statistics Canada said that our water and sewer systems are in desperate need of repair. Municipalities need stable, long-term funding to maintain our water and sewer systems and to guarantee that they will work properly in the long term.

When will our communities receive long-term funding for their infrastructures?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government has put its heart and soul into this problem and has worked very hard with municipalities and communities across the country, as well as with the provinces. So far, I am pleased to say that five provinces have signed a cooperation agreement with us under the terms of the Building Canada Fund. I expect my colleagues to support this step.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister should be forthcoming with Canadians and admit that the new money for infrastructure represents only a fraction of the program.

The water and sewer systems are not the only things that need help; Canada's bridges and roads do as well. According to Statistics Canada, more than 55% of Canadian bridges have exceeded their useful life, but the government still does not allocate any funding for infrastructure.

When will the government provide funding so that work can start on road construction? We do not want talk. We want tangible and visible action.

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is tangible and visible action all over his province. We were able to open and inaugurate the Trans-Canada Highway. We invested in programs in the members' provinces. I am thinking in particular of Toronto, where we invested \$1 billion in public transportation to expand the rapid transit network. The examples are there. All they have to do is open their eyes.

* * *

[*English*]

POLITICAL DONATIONS

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 2006, our government passed a tough, new anti-corruption law. Corporate contributions were banned and individual donations were limited to \$1,100.

However, now the Liberal Party is flagrantly breaking that law, arguing that any size donation, if it is made in an auction, can be donated outside the law. This means that wealthy individuals, corporations and lobbyists can bid \$200,000 for a \$100 dinner with the Liberal leader.

Why is the government allowing the Liberal Party to ignore the anti-corruption law and illegally fundraise lobbyists and wealthy corporations?

The Speaker: I am not sure this question falls within the administrative responsibility of the government but we will hear from the government House leader in case there is some argument for putting it there.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government is very concerned about tonight's illegal Liberal fundraising event. It follows on the illegal Liberal fundraiser with illegal corporate sponsors that took place last October, which was spoken of in the House.

This is a very serious matter. I was surprised to hear a Liberal Party official actually defending this illegal practice. We do not know how widespread this illegal activity is, however, it does appear to be viewed as a normal practice within the Liberal Party.

* * *

CHALK RIVER NUCLEAR FACILITIES

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on November 22, 2007, officials from MDS Nordion informed the government of a possible medical isotope shortage. On December 1, Canadian Press was the first to report an impending isotope shortage. On December 3, the Minister of Natural Resources was informed of the shortage. On December 5, the Minister of Health was informed of the crisis.

My question for the minister is very simple. Why did it take so long, nearly two weeks, for anyone in the government to inform the health minister of an impending health crisis?

• (1455)

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, a lot of information was shared at committee level. The head of MDS Nordion, at committee or at the scrum thereafter, said, "I think the government was doing what they could do, frankly".

As soon as we learned that this was not just a shortage but a crisis that was going to affect the health and safety of Canadians, we acted. We put a bill before Parliament and made sure that Parliament had all the relevant information that was necessary to make a decision. We acted to protect the health and safety of Canadians.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, either the health minister is not telling the truth or he is incompetent.

Let us look at the facts. MDS Nordion issued a press release on November 30 outlining a problem. CBC *The National* ran a story on the implications of the shortage on December 4. MDS Nordion met with officials in natural resources on November 22.

Oral Questions

Yet the minister expects us and Canadians to believe that no one, not one official, thought it important enough to bring to the minister.

Is the minister lying about this or is he simply incompetent?

The Speaker: If I heard that correctly, it is the second time we have had this word used today. I must warn hon. members that these words are unparliamentary and not permitted.

The hon. Minister of Health has the floor.

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is, indeed, a serious issue and it requires all members to take the issue seriously.

The record is clear. My depositions before two parliamentary committees were quite clear and they were supported by my deputy minister and assistant deputy minister.

When we learned of the issue on December 5, we acted swiftly. We gathered information throughout the country. We realized that this was not merely a regional shortage, that this was a national crisis. We gave that information to the government. The government acted, the Prime Minister acted and all of Parliament acted. We did so to benefit the health and safety of Canadians.

The hon. member now wants to sully what was a unanimous agreement in the House. Shame on her.

* * *

HOMELESSNESS

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the finance minister was part of the Harris government in Ontario that wanted to make homelessness a crime and called it “tough love”. That “tough love” was applied to his last federal budget, which shut out the homeless, aboriginals, children and seniors living in poverty. However, he paid his good friend MacPhie \$122,000 to craft that “tough love” budget speech.

Why does the government's anti-poverty plan help just one group: old, tired Mike Harris cronies who were thrown out of Queen's Park?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the last budget, as I am sure the hon. member will recall, we created and funded the Canadian Mental Health Commission, which is now headed by Mr. Kirby. This is a very important body that will help address important issues in Canada, including homelessness, which, as members know, relates, to a significant degree, to mental illness and mental challenges faced by people living on the streets.

These are important measures that we have taken.

We have also gone forward with the working income tax benefit to help low income Canadians who are capable of working to get to work. That is something the member's party looked at but—

The Speaker: The hon. member for York West.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the finance minister's history speaks for itself no matter what he tries to say.

Poverty is a national problem. The Conservatives have refused to take leadership in the fight against poverty, preferring a laissez-faire, I do not care attitude.

The Liberal Party has a plan. Quebec and Newfoundland have plans in place and Ontario will implement one this year.

Do the Conservatives have a plan to fight poverty, or is it the minister's typical old plan, which is to cut programs for the poor, jail the homeless, slash child care and swipe another \$5 billion from the aboriginal community?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the views expressed by the hon. member do not reflect what is happening.

As the United Way of Greater Toronto said, with respect to the working income tax benefit, WITB is a positive change “that will help to improve the situations of low-income families”.

That is what the United Way report stated about that important social program.

What this is not about is idle talk, like the former government did. This is about bringing forward important programs to help people get to work. We got it done.

* * *

● (1500)

GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

Hon. Ken Dryden (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, companies can make their voices heard because, with the tax system, they can pay for their voices to be heard. Community groups cannot. That is why past Liberal or even past Progressive Conservative governments offered them support. They knew these voices were critical as part of a mix of voices that make Canada work.

The Prime Minister has cut the funding for literacy, aboriginals, women, those with disabilities, child care, students and the poor. He has cut these voices off. His message, “In my caucus, in this country, it's only my voice that counts”.

My question is for the Prime Minister. Why do these voices not matter too?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government is a government that is standing up for the working people, the people who are trying to make a better life for themselves.

Who is it that the Liberal Party listens to? Who has a voice there? Who gets to talk to the member for York Centre? A corporation that is willing to pay the sky is the limit donation tonight to his party. That is who gets to talk to them about policy. That is who they listen to. What is more, it is illegal. He should apologize and he should—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for York Centre.

Oral Questions

Hon. Ken Dryden (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government's game is a cynical game. For literacy, aboriginals, women, those with disabilities, child care, students and the poor, it cuts off funding and makes people feel powerless, makes them beg and makes them grateful for crumbs. It then gives them a choice: if they say something, they get nothing; if they do not say anything, they lose their voice. Canada loses their voice. Canada loses Canada's voice.

When will the Prime Minister start acting like a prime minister and not the Bytown bully?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, from time immemorial, the Liberals' game has been a cynical game. They use power to line their pockets, as they did in the sponsorship scandal, and find every way they can to break the rules for their own personal benefit.

Tonight there is a fundraiser. The invitation reads:

The evening will include a live auction. You can bid on the following:

Watch a live Canadiens vs. Senators Hockey game in the company of the [member for York Centre]

The sky is your limit during this auction!

A successful bid is not a political contribution and is not eligible for a receipt for income tax purposes. Your successful bid will not affect your annual political contribution limit...

That is against the law and he should stop—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Terrebonne—Blainville.

* * *

[Translation]

GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we are seeing more and more instances of political interference in the Prime Minister's Office. His press secretary interceded in support of Rosdev and met with a company seeking government contracts in the military sector accompanied by a Conservative Party fundraiser, Leo Housakos. That same press secretary, in cooperation with the office of the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, pushed hard with the Port of Montreal's board of directors in order to ensure that one Robert Abdallah, a former manager with the City of Montreal, was appointed to run the port.

Will the Prime Minister admit that political interference is a common occurrence in his government—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, regarding the appointment of the CEO of the Port of Montreal, as my colleagues in this House know, that decision was made by the port's board of directors, which followed a procedure that they themselves had established. The result, of course, was a new CEO of the port. This was endorsed by the board and by this government.

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Mr. Speaker, during the election campaign, the Prime Minister said, "We need a new government to ensure that these important public appointments

are merit based." We have learned that the Prime Minister's Office, together with the staff of the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities flouted the law that requires the manager of the Port of Montreal to be appointed independently by the board of directors and, furthermore, that his office conspired to appoint the protege of the Mayor of Montreal, the former boss of Soudas and Housakos.

Is that what the government was promising: interference and patronage?

● (1505)

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there was no interference, cronyism or patronage. The board of directors had a number of candidates to choose from. And that is what it did. It chose the best candidate.

* * *

[English]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday Australia's prime minister issued a formal apology to the country's stolen generation for policies that degraded its indigenous people. He said, "For the pain, suffering and hurt of these stolen generations...we say sorry".

Since 2006, Liberals have demanded an official apology to the survivors of residential schools. After much delay, the government grudgingly committed to one.

When will the government follow Australia's lead? When will Canada finally say, "We are sorry?"

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are delighted that the Liberals, since 2006, have decided that they would like to apologize.

As we know, our Conservative government is committed to delivering a respectful and meaningful apology to all former students of residential schools in Canada. In the throne speech, the Prime Minister committed to mark the launch of the truth and reconciliation commission with a statement of apology to help close this very sad chapter in Canadian history.

We are working with first nations to put together both the truth and reconciliation commission and the apology. It is long overdue. It never happened under the Liberal government.

* * *

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Monday, at a speech in Edmonton, star Liberal candidate Justin Trudeau showed his true colours. His comment that Canadians who do not learn a second language are lazy is an insult to the 22 million unilingual anglophones and francophones in our country.

Routine Proceedings

Can the Secretary of State (Multiculturalism and Canadian Identity) comment on Mr. Trudeau's insulting remarks to over 68% of the Canadian population?

[Translation]

Hon. Jason Kenney (Secretary of State (Multiculturalism and Canadian Identity), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would call Justin Trudeau's remarks disgusting. They show a lack of tolerance towards unilingual Canadians.

[English]

Millions of Canadians would love to speak both official languages, but are, frankly, in many cases often too busy raising their families, working and running their businesses.

Mr. Trudeau, a child of privilege, should try to understand the real struggles of Canadians, many of whom do not have that as a realistic option: to learn and speak both languages. Both he and his party should apologize.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[Translation]

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table the report of a Canadian parliamentary delegation concerning its official visit to Malaysia from November 3 to 9, 2007.

* * *

[English]

PRIVACY COMMISSIONER

The Speaker: I also have the honour to lay upon the table the special report of the Privacy Commissioner concerning the examination of RCMP exempt data banks. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(h), this document is deemed to have been permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

* * *

• (1510)

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): Pursuant to Standing Order 36(8) I have the honour to table in both official languages the government's response to one petition.

* * *

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Hon. Carol Skelton (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the following reports of the Canadian delegation of the Canada-United States Interparliamentary Group representing its participation at the Pacific NorthWest Economic Region (PNWER) Economic Leadership Forum held at Whistler, British Columbia, November 15 to 17, 2007.

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

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

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

[Translation]

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Orders 104 and 114, I have the honour to present to the House the 11th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding the membership of House committees.

If the House gives its consent, I intend to move concurrence in the 11th report later this day.

[English]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure to present, in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women in relation to women and the court challenges program.

The court challenges program was relatively inexpensive but highly effective. It provided vulnerable women and minority groups with the right for equality.

Therefore, the Standing Committee on the Status of Women recommends that this government, which cancelled this very inexpensive but very effective program, reinstate the program to its funding and to its mandate.

I also have the pleasure to present the third report of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women in relation to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Canada was the lead on this declaration but through the Conservative government the declaration was denied and Canada voted against it. The committee recommends that the government endorse this declaration.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADIAN MULTICULTURALISM ACT

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-505, An Act to amend the Canadian Multiculturalism Act (non-application in Quebec).

He said: Mr. Speaker, today I am introducing a bill for first reading that is very important to Quebec, to the identity of our Quebec nation, and to all people around the world who will choose to live in the only nation in America whose common language is French.

Our bill proposes that the Canadian multiculturalism policy no longer apply in Quebec. Canada's House of Commons has recognized the Quebec Nation, so the National Assembly must be allowed to develop its cultural and identity policies according to Quebec's greater needs. Therefore, everyone in this House should recognize the importance of debating this legislative measure, which I have the pleasure of introducing for first reading in this House.

I would also like to thank the member for Rivière-du-Nord for supporting my bill.

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

* * *

● (1515)

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with the consent of the House, I move that the 11th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, tabled in the House today, be adopted.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

[English]

INTERGOVERNMENTAL PANEL ON CLIMATE CHANGE

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations and I believe you will find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move, seconded by the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley:

That this House recognizes and honours the great contribution to science and the fight against climate change by the Canadian scientists of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change who were awarded the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize for their efforts.

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is a reception that is going on this afternoon hosted by all parties, but the Conservative Party. I would like to put on the record for parliamentarians and Canadians that this is a very unfortunate moment because the government only today, in an act of damage control, has decided to bring this motion forward. It has not valued, nor recognized the work of the IPCC. I think it is a shameful moment for Canadians.

The Speaker: I am not sure the member for Ottawa South has raised a point of order.

The question is, does the Minister of the Environment have the unanimous consent of the House to propose the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Routine Proceedings

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.

(Motion Agreed to)

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Speaker, the House has just given its unanimous consent to a motion that came to us outside of the ordinary order of precedence. Yesterday, the chief government whip rejected such a practice. He said that it would create a bad precedent.

The precedent now seems to have been set, so in the same spirit of cooperation in the House, I wonder if there is now unanimous consent to adopt Motion No. 427, standing in the name of the hon. member for Davenport, which states:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should designate September of each year as Ovarian Cancer Awareness Month.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Wascana have the unanimous consent of the House?

The hon. government House leader is rising on a point of order.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I believe the Liberal House leader has misrepresented entirely what the chief government whip said yesterday. The point that he made is that private members' business would not be taken out of order.

That is very different than the traditional practice of consulting among the House leaders on a motion that is not on the private members' register. So, that is a different matter entirely.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, I believe that there have been consultations among the parties and there is consent for the following motion: That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practices of this House, Bill C-42, An Act to amend the Museums Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts shall be deemed to have been read a second time and referred to a committee of the whole, deemed considered in committee of the whole, deemed reported without amendment, deemed concurred in at the report stage, and deemed read a third time and passed.

The Speaker: Does the hon. government House leader have the unanimous consent of the House to propose the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

* * *

● (1520)

PETITIONS

NATIONAL SEX OFFENDER REGISTRY

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to present two petitions today. The first is signed by dozens of citizens in Windsor and Essex County.

Routine Proceedings

The petitioners draw the attention of the House to the fact that penalties for sexual abusers of children are clearly not sufficient, as a majority of Canadians feel.

They call upon Parliament to protect our children by taking all necessary steps to ensure that all sexual offenders be required to be listed on a national registry for life. They also request that three time offenders be considered as dangerous offenders and that their jail sentences should be stiffened.

VISITOR VISAS

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition I am pleased to present today is signed by hundreds of citizens across Windsor and Essex County.

The petitioners draw the attention of the House to the fact that the Republic of Poland has successfully joined the European Union, that Canada and Poland together are active members of NATO promoting peace and security globally and that Poland uses biometric passport technology to secure its identification system.

They also draw to the attention of the House that lifting of visitor visa requirements for Poland will increase family visitation, tourism, cultural exchanges and trade missions and that the newly elected Canadian Polish Congress, representing 800,000 Canadians of Polish heritage, strongly recommends the lifting of such visa requirements for Poland.

The petitioners therefore call upon Parliament to lift the visa requirements for the Republic of Poland.

CANADA POST

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition with the appropriate signatures.

The petitioners are concerned that Canada Post is switching residents from door-to-door mail delivery to community mailbox delivery without properly assessing the safety of these community mailboxes to the residents. They feel many of the community mailboxes being established in the province of Prince Edward Island are no safer than regular mailboxes and have additional problems in accessibility, litter, snow build-up and the environment.

They call upon Parliament to ensure proper consultation and proper assessment.

[*Translation*]

PHOSPHATES

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, after tabling an initial petition of more than 1,000 signatures last October, today I am tabling in this House a new petition signed by more than 2,000 citizens from the riding of Berthier—Maskinongé.

The petitioners are asking the federal government to act quickly and eliminate dishwasher and laundry detergent containing phosphates. I invite all members of this House to do the same by supporting Bill C-469.

[*English*]

SECURITY AND PROSPERITY PARTNERSHIP

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to table a petition from a good number of constituents and other Canadians.

The petitioners are very concerned about the security and prosperity partnership of North America, which they say is really NAFTA on steroids. They are concerned about the government's agenda with respect to continental integration and the lowering of standards to the very bottom of the heap. They are worried about losing valuable national programs, especially in the areas of health care.

They call upon the government to stop the secret negotiations and to start to act on behalf of Canadians.

CANADIAN PACIFIC RAILWAY

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I again have the honour to present yet another petition from folks in my area concerning the Canadian Pacific Railway and its building of a rail yard, which is deemed to be inadequate in protecting underground gas lines and, in particular, in protecting the pristine Nith River from spills, leaks and contaminants, as well as inappropriate and improper sound barriers and on and on, including no guarantees that the engines will not idle for days and days, polluting our atmosphere like they do in Cambridge.

In this petition of over 270 signatures, I notice that a lot of names are from outside my riding, which seems to indicate a groundswell of Canadian citizens against the behaviour of Canadian Pacific Railway.

[*Translation*]

PEDOPHILIA

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to table a petition that was started by two citizens from Ahuntsic regarding the case of Mr. Bégin and what happened in my riding.

I already presented a petition with more than 5,000 signatures in November 2007. I am now tabling, in the same spirit, this petition calling for stronger pedophile legislation.

● (1525)

[*English*]

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition, totalling over 500 signatures, on behalf of Canadians.

The petitioners ask that the government respect Canada's long tradition of providing safe harbour to those fleeing militarism. The majority of Canadians did not support the war in Iraq and saw it as an illegal war. The petitioners argue that according to the principle of international law, soldiers have a duty, not a choice, to refuse to carry out illegal orders.

They call upon the government to give war resisters sanctuary and let them stay.

CANADA STUDENT LOANS

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition on behalf of students who are struggling with crippling debt and face soaring tuition fees.

The petitioners ask the minister to ensure that the review of the Canada student loans system resolves some of the major flaws by creating a federal needs based grant system for all Canadian student loans in every year of study: to reduce the federal student loan interest rate; to create a student loan ombudsperson; to provide better relief for repayment of debt; and to create federal standards governing the conduct of government and private loan collection agencies.

YOUTH CRIMINAL JUSTICE ACT

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of friends and family of Shane Rolston, who is a murder victim.

The petitioners call upon government to strengthen the Youth Criminal Justice Act and to deal with the judicial system so the penalties meted out more closely match the crime.

These constituents call for changes, many changes which the government is currently in the process of trying to pass, and they look to the Senate to pass these measures to help deal with these situations.

[Translation]

AFGHANISTAN

Mrs. Carole Freeman (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today, February 13, I am tabling a petition in French that was signed by many of my constituents in Châteauguay—Saint-Constant.

The petition includes 783 signatures and calls on the House of Commons and the government to make a clear commitment to withdraw the troops from the combat zones of Afghanistan in February 2009. The petitioners are also calling for the mission to be rebalanced by decreasing the military component and focusing on humanitarian support.

Several hundreds of people have clearly expressed to me, verbally and in writing, their disagreement with the current direction of the mission.

[English]

NAHANNI NATIONAL PARK RESERVE

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to present a petition on behalf of Hamilton East—Stoney Creek citizens who share my concern about the environment.

The petitioners request that Parliament move quickly to expand Nahanni National Park Reserve to protect the entire South Nahanni watershed and Nahanni karst lands so as to secure this globally significant wilderness for future generations for Canadians and for the whole of the world.

Routine Proceedings

SECURITY AND PROSPERITY PARTNERSHIP

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am presenting a petition similar to my colleague from Winnipeg on the security and prosperity partnership talks among the United States of America, Mexico and Canada.

The petitioners are particularly concerned about its impact on our ability to protect our water. We know that south of the border, folks are getting thirsty. It worries us that they are eyeing our resource and our stewardship of that. If this is on the table at the security and prosperity partnership discussion, then we want to know more about it. We want it to be more open and public, to have debate in the House and to have it approved by the Canadian people, not just a group of well placed minions behind closed doors.

The petition is signed by 150 people from across the country.

* * *

MUSEUMS ACT

(Bill C-42. On the Order: Government Orders:)

February 11, 2008—Second reading and reference to the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage of Bill C-42, An Act to amend the Museums Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts—Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will try this again. I am pleased to report that there have been further consultations among the parties.

[Translation]

This time I will give it a try in the other official language in order to be totally clear. I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practices of this House, Bill C-42, An Act to amend the Museums Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, shall be deemed to have been read a second time and referred to a Committee of the Whole, deemed considered in Committee of the Whole, deemed reported without amendment, deemed concurred in at the report stage and deemed read a third time and passed.

● (1530)

The Speaker: Does the hon. Leader of the Government in the House of Commons have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time, considered in committee of the whole, reported without amendment, concurred in, read the third time and passed.)

* * *

[English]

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, the following questions will be answered today: Nos. 165, 174, 178 and 179.

Routine Proceedings

[Text]

Question No. 165—**Ms. Chris Charlton:**

With respect to non-posted Canada pension plan contributions, and the project undertaken in or around 2000, where contributions dating back to 1966 were matched to contributor accounts: (a) what was the total number of contributors who had contributions matched to their accounts; (b) what was the total number of underpayments and the dollar value of those underpayments; (c) what was the total number of frozen underpayments and the dollar value that may be owed but which has not been paid as the contributors are now deceased; (d) what is the number of contributors who are now deceased, where the estate would now qualify for a death benefit as a result of this project as they now have the required contributions; (e) how was the Canadian public informed that they now qualify for a benefit that they did not previously receive as a result of not meeting the contributor requirements; and (f) what is the number of valid contributions that have not yet been posted to a contributor's accounts and what is the dollar value of those contributions?

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in response to (a), in 1996-97, the Canada pension plan, CPP, was able to match 702,000 T4 information tax slips to 590,000 contributor client accounts. At that time, CPP was responsible for roughly 23 million client record of earnings, ROE, accounts to which earnings and CPP contributions were credited.

In response to (b), of the 590,000 contributor client accounts, Service Canada identified 93,000 payments owed to clients who were receiving benefits from the CPP or who had been in receipt of benefits from CPP, but for various reasons were no longer eligible for payments. These "underpayments" totalled \$38 million which could be sent to CPP beneficiaries in lump sum payments to enhance their current financial situation. As well, these clients would benefit from an increase in their monthly benefit amount for all future payments from CPP.

In response to (c), this left roughly 43,000 payments to be made to clients who were no longer receiving benefits for various reasons such as the death of a client or the cancellation and suspension of benefits. These payments are referred to as "frozen underpayments" and the total dollar value associated to them was approximately \$11 million. The frozen underpayments were handled in three phases. Phase one saw the release of 3,741 frozen underpayments to clients who were still alive. Phase two saw the release of an additional 16,148 frozen underpayments to a deceased client's surviving spouse or child/children. The value of frozen underpayments for phase one and phase two totalled approximately \$5 million. Phase three consisted of the remaining 23,000 frozen underpayments totalling approximately \$6 million which belonged to clients who were deceased and had no recorded surviving spouse or child/children. CPP was unable to release any of these frozen underpayments.

In response to (d), since this project, CPP has worked hard over the years to identify clients, or their next of kin who were eligible for these frozen underpayments. We were able to release 16,148 frozen underpayments to a deceased client's surviving spouse or child/children. There are 23,000 frozen underpayments remaining that cannot be paid as the client is deceased and has no surviving spouse or child/children. If a client was alive at the time of the project, but is now deceased in 2008, then this client's account would have been adjusted at the onset of the project and thus they would have received a statement of contributions informing them of their eligibility to benefits. In an effort to advise clients of their possible

eligibility to all CPP benefits, the Canada pension plan has sent a total of 22.4 million CPP statements of contributions to clients of all ages in 2000-01, encouraging them to view their personal information and contact CPP if corrections are required. This method of contacting clients continues today.

In response to (e), as the majority of the clients affected at the time were not yet in receipt of benefits—still contributing to the plan—their accounts were updated and, in 2000, they were sent a statement of contributions advising them of their benefit eligibility. For the people who were in receipt of benefits at the time, they received an increase in their benefit and an underpayment of benefits with a letter of explanation. As for the payments to people who were no longer receiving benefits, letters were sent to them and payments were released. In the case of a deceased beneficiary, letters were sent to their surviving spouses or child/children advising them of moneys owed to the deceased beneficiary.

The Government of Canada wants everyone to receive the benefits for which they are entitled. Each year, the government proactively informs millions of Canadians about their entitlement to CPP, old age security and guaranteed income supplement benefits through annual mailings of T4A(P) information slips and statements of contributions, to name a few. These mailings provide contact information to clients should they have any questions about their benefits or the information on their statements.

In response to (f), as of December 2007, there were four million T4 slips with a total CPP contribution dollar value of \$104 million which we continue to release to client accounts through various projects and individual client queries. Given that this represents less than 0.05% of the total contributions to the Canada pension plan since 1966, the accuracy of all client CPP record of earnings accounts is ascertained at 99.95%.

Question No. 174—**Hon. Shawn Murphy:**

With regard to services to airports provided by the Canadian Border Services Agency in 2006 and 2007: (a) what was the average amount charged to airports for non-core hour service fees; (b) what was the amount charged to the Charlottetown Airport Authority; (c) what was the amount charged to the Greater Moncton International Airport Authority; (d) what was the amount charged to the Halifax International Airport Authority; and (e) what was the amount charged to the Val-d'Or Regional Airport?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in response to (a), a total of 93 cost recovery agreements were prepared for CBSA for non-core hour services at airports in fiscal year 2006-07, for a total of \$2,665,772. The average cost to provide CBSA services for these agreements was \$28,664. As of January 29, 2008, there are 82 agreements totaling \$2,085,261 for fiscal 2007-08, with an average cost of \$25,430 per agreement.

In response to (b), with reference to the amounts charged to the Charlottetown Airport Authority, the CBSA has an obligation under the Access to Information Act, ATI, to consult with third parties prior to the release of information that may put at risk their financial, commercial, or technical information, or that may cause them a prejudice. We would thus need to contact the client who is a party to a cost recovery agreement to seek their approval to release the information.

In response to (c), no amounts were directly charged to the Greater Moncton International Airport Authority for fiscal 2006-07 and 2007-08. However, a total of eight agreements were signed with different air carriers—air carriers who use Moncton airport during non-core hours—for a total of \$294,685 in 2006-07. As of January 29, 2008, there are six agreements in place for a total of \$356,310 for fiscal 2007-08.

In response to (d), no amounts were directly charged to the Halifax International Airport Authority for fiscal 2006-07 and 2007-08. However, a total of 16 agreements were signed with different air carriers—air carriers who use Halifax airport during non-core hours—for a total of \$587,620 in 2006-07. As of April 1, 2007 the Halifax airport became 24/7 thus no amounts were charged in fiscal 2007-08.

In response to (e), no amounts were directly charged to the Val D'Or Regional Airport for fiscal 2006-07 and 2007-08. However, a total of two agreements were signed with air carriers—air carriers who use Val D'Or airport during non-core hours—for a total of \$8,043 in 2006-07. No agreements are in place for the 2007-08 fiscal year.

Question No. 178—**Mr. Rick Dykstra:**

With respect to Canada's tax system, what is the estimated annual cost to create an "Angel Investor Tax Credit" along the lines recommended by the Conference Board of Canada's Leaders Roundtable on Commercialization?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, angel investors are high net worth individuals, usually with an entrepreneurial background, who make very early stage equity investments in small private companies.

The Conference Board of Canada's Leaders Roundtable on Commercialization endorsed a proposal by the National Angel Organization, NAO, for an innovation and productivity tax credit, IPTC, that would provide a combined federal-provincial 30% tax credit, up to a maximum \$250,000 credit, on such investments.

Based on estimates by the Canadian Angel Investment Network, which suggest that angel investors invest approximately \$3 billion in Canadian businesses annually, a federal-only credit of 30% would cost \$900 million per year.

Introducing such a credit would largely subsidize existing investments that would have occurred in the absence of the credit, thereby reducing the cost effectiveness of the proposed measure. The Government of Canada currently provides a number of generous tax incentives that benefit angel investors and to improve access to capital for small business, such as: a 50% inclusion rate for capital gains; the capital gains rollover for small business investments, whereby the tax on capital gains on small business shares is deferred to the extent that proceeds are reinvested in other small businesses;

Routine Proceedings

the \$750,000 lifetime capital gains exemption for small business shares; and deductibility of capital losses on small business shares against all income sources.

Question No. 179—**Mr. Omar Alghabra:**

With regard to all permits requested of and issued by the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration in 2006 and 2007: (a) how many applications were received; (b) how many permits have been issued; (c) what was the distribution of the permits issued by federal electoral riding; and (d) what was the distribution of the applications denied by federal electoral riding?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, insofar as Citizenship and Immigration Canada, CIC, is concerned, in response to (a), this information is not available as there is no application form for these types of requests.

In response to (b), a total of 25,911 temporary resident permits were issued from January 1, 2006 to November 30, 2007. Of this number, 490 were issued in light of ministerial instruction. Please note that the 2007 calendar year data is not yet finalized.

In response to (c), a breakdown by riding is not tracked by CIC.

In response to (d), a breakdown by federal electoral riding is not tracked by CIC.

* * *

[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 Questions Nos. 166 and 192 could be made orders for returns, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 166—**Ms. Chris Charlton:**

With respect to Disability applications under the Canada Pension Plan for the years 2004 to 2006, inclusive: (a) what was the total number of applications received by the end of each respective year; (b) what were the total numbers of both granted and denied benefits on initial application; (c) what was the total number of denied clients who requested a level 81 reconsideration; (d) what were the total numbers of both granted and denied applications at the reconsideration level; (e) what was the total number of clients who appealed to level 82 (Review Tribunal); (f) what was the number of clients who were granted a benefit prior to a hearing (Review Tribunal); and (g) what were the total numbers of granted and denied applications at the level 82 (review Tribunal)?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 192—**Mr. Rodger Cuzner:**

With regard to the Small Craft Harbours program of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, what was the funding amount allocated, granted or contributed to each harbour in each federal electoral district within the province of Nova Scotia, in each of the years 2003 to 2007, inclusive?

(Return tabled)

Government Orders

[English]

STARRED QUESTIONS

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 Starred Questions Nos. 176 and 177 could be made orders for returns, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

*Question No. 176—**Mr. Rick Dykstra:**

With respect to Canada's international development commitments, what is the estimated annual cost to increase Canada's international aid expenditures by 10% instead of the 8% currently that is currently committed by the present government?

(Return tabled)

*Question No. 177—**Mr. Rick Dykstra:**

With regard to government initiatives affecting seniors, what is the estimated annual cost: (a) to end the 10 year residency requirement for Old Age Security; and (b) to expand the full benefits of the Veteran's Independence Program to widows who currently do not qualify for the program?

(Return tabled)

[English]

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

[Translation]

REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY DEBATE

LIVESTOCK INDUSTRY

The Speaker: The Chair has notice of a request for an emergency debate from the hon. member for Richmond—Arthabaska. He now has the floor to explain his request.

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, thank you for giving me the opportunity to stand up for agricultural producers who have been left behind through the insensitivity of this Conservative government—I am talking about hog and beef producers.

“The situation we are in is untenable for producers.” Those are the words of Jean-Guy Vincent, the president of the Fédération des

producteurs de porcs du Québec. The article appeared in *La Terre de chez nous* on January 31, 2008.

The livestock industry is currently going through a crisis caused by the rising dollar and rising cost of inputs, combined with a major drop in the price of meat, in the case of pork, and additional costs for managing and disposing of specified risk materials, in the case of beef producers.

There are several reasons why an emergency debate is needed, and I am satisfied that in your great wisdom, Mr. Speaker, you will recognize this urgency. First, there is the silence of the Prime Minister and the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-food in response to the letters they have been sent by producers. And then there is also the unanimous first report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-food recommending that transitional measures be put in place to alleviate this crisis, along with longer-term measures to improve the competitiveness of the industry.

This situation cannot go on. Some producers have handed their keys over to their financial institutions, or are about to do so, many of them having stretched their credit to the limit. That is why the Bloc Québécois is asking that an emergency debate be held on this serious crisis.

● (1535)

The Speaker: Obviously, I have received the letter from the hon. member for Richmond—Arthabaska and I have also heard his arguments today concerning the urgency of this matter.

Normally, because there is a committee report on this subject and therefore there will be a debate on the concurrence motion, I would disregard a request of this nature. However, at this point the report is in but the committee has requested a response from the government, and we are waiting for that response. But it is not necessary to wait until April 10, because that may be a little too far away.

I therefore believe that this is an urgent matter. The hon. member has explained his arguments clearly today. Accordingly, I will allow the debate this evening, after the time of adjournment.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

CONSTITUTION ACT, 2007 (DEMOCRATIC REPRESENTATION)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC) moved that Bill C-22, An Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867 (Democratic representation), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to open debate on the Constitution Act, 2007: the democratic representation bill.

Government Orders

[*English*]

This bill reflects the government's commitment to modernizing Canada's democracy and strengthening our federation through democratic reform. It fulfills the government's commitment during the last election to restore the principle of representation by population in the House of Commons, while protecting the seat counts of provinces with slower population growth.

The bill will amend the formula set out in the Constitution for the readjustment of seats among the provinces, which happens after every 10 year census, so that it is more responsive to population growth in faster growing provinces. According to current population projections, this will mean that the provinces of Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta will receive additional seats after the next redistribution.

[*Translation*]

Consistent with the approach taken since Confederation, these seats will be added after the census in 2011, through the regular electoral boundaries redistribution process.

[*English*]

I would like to spend my time today addressing three points. First, I will outline the problems with the existing formula passed by Parliament in 1985.

[*Translation*]

Secondly, I will discuss the principles underlying the democratic representation bill.

[*English*]

Lastly, I will provide a technical overview of the formula being proposed in the new bill.

To understand why we have introduced the democratic representation bill it is necessary to understand the existing formula for the readjustment of seats in the House of Commons. The 1985 formula is based on three main steps.

First, a basic representation by population formula is used. The total population of the provinces is divided by 279, which was the number of MPs from the provinces in the House at the time the formula was adopted. The quotient, known as the national quotient, is then applied to the population of each province to determine its seat allocation.

● (1540)

[*Translation*]

The second step is not based on population. It requires adding extra seats to some provinces based on constitutional seat "floors".

There are two such floors.

[*English*]

The first, known as the Senate floor, requires that a province have at least as many MPs as it does senators. The second floor is known as the grandfather clause. Every province is guaranteed as many seats as it had when the 1985 formula came into force, even if its population has subsequently declined. As a final step, a seat is added for each territory.

The current formula was debated and passed in 1985 and was intended primarily to restrict the rate of growth of the chamber. Indeed, if the 1974 formula were still in place, we would now be sitting in a House of about 369 members rather than one of 308. However, the 1985 formula limited growth in the membership of the House entirely at the expense of the faster growing provinces that do not enjoy seat floors for their seat counts.

With the passage of time, this has resulted in a serious representational imbalance in the House of Commons. Allow me to explain. For example, in the last readjustment, British Columbia had 13% of the population of the provinces and received 36 seats, which is 13% of the 279 in the House in 1985. If the current number of seats had been used, British Columbia would have been entitled to 40 seats.

[*Translation*]

In addition to this, once extra seats are accorded to provinces under the seat floors—currently, only Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia do not rely on seat floors to maintain their seats in the House—the relative representation of faster-growing provinces is further diminished.

[*English*]

What it means in practical terms is that Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia are the only provinces that are significantly underrepresented in the House of Commons. All other provinces are overrepresented in the House relative to their populations. What it means for Canadians in those provinces is that on average their members of Parliament have larger populations to serve than anywhere else in the country.

[*Translation*]

For instance, based on recently released 2006 census results, an average MP from Ontario, Alberta or BC represents 26,000 more constituents than the average MP from the other seven provinces.

[*English*]

This disparity in representation will only get worse over time if we stay with the existing formula.

[*Translation*]

Based on 2011 population projections, an average MP from Ontario, Alberta or BC will be called upon to represent over 29,000 more constituents than an MP in the other provinces.

[*English*]

Looked at another way, an average MP in Alberta represents almost 3.5 times as many constituents as an average MP in Prince Edward Island.

The electoral district of Brampton West has the unfortunate status of having the most constituents in a riding, with 170,422 people, based on the 2006 census. Currently, the riding of Labrador has the fewest constituents with only 29,084.

Government Orders

When I hear from Canadians in rapidly growing provinces, the issue of under-representation is very real for them. It creates a sense of distance and alienation from Ottawa. That is not good for our country or our democracy. That is why this government has introduced the democratic representation bill to restore fair representation in the House of Commons for all Canadians.

In developing the new formula, we sought to restore the principle of representation by population while respecting the constitutionally protected principle of the proportionate representation of the provinces in the House of Commons, which cannot be disturbed without the consent of seven provinces representing 50% of the population, a constitutional amendment threshold.

The principle of proportionate representation is a principle that has a democratic basis.

[*Translation*]

It is how, at the federal level, we balance the representational interests of Canadians that live in a country as large as ours, with a host of diverse regional, cultural and economic interests.

The principle of proportionate representation requires that all provinces be represented in the House roughly in proportion to their populations, in other words, that representation by population be generalized so that Canadians and the provinces have an equal voice in their national Parliament.

[*English*]

This balance between strict representation by population and protection for provinces with slower growing populations is not always an easy one. That is probably why the readjustment formula has been amended so many times since Confederation.

The balancing of principles was part of the debate when Canada was created by Sir John A. Macdonald, George-Étienne Cartier and the Fathers of Confederation. Their balancing of representation by population, with respect for the proportionate representation of the provinces, made possible the agreement that both forged our country and allowed it to grow over time.

As we all know, it was Canada West, as Ontario was then called, that sought to base the House of Commons on representation by population at Confederation, by the obvious fact that its population was larger than that of Canada East, as Quebec was called at the time.

[*Translation*]

However, decades later, it was Quebec that was calling for representation by population when its representation in the House was diminished by seat protection for other provinces.

[*English*]

Similarly, while Ontario is now significantly underrepresented, during the first half of the last century, from 1914 to 1946, it benefited substantially from constitutional seat protection provisions because its population was in relative decline.

In developing the formula proposed in the democratic representation bill, there were three additional considerations that we took into account in achieving our objective of proportionate representation.

First, the formula had to be more responsive to population changes so that Canadians would be more equitably represented in the House of Commons.

The current formula does not allow rapidly growing provinces to have their representation increase with their populations. This puts them in an unfair position and puts their constituents at a disadvantage.

[*Translation*]

At the same time, of course, the formula must recognize and be sensitive to the representation of provinces with slower-growing populations.

[*English*]

Therefore, we have updated the formula to ease the constraints on the representation of faster growing provinces, while maintaining protections for other provinces and territories.

[*Translation*]

As a second consideration, we needed to ensure the seat distribution was sensitive to the context and dynamics of the House. Canada is a country of small, medium and large provinces that all need to have an effective voice in the legislature.

[*English*]

• (1545)

While being fair to larger provinces, we needed to ensure the formula allowed smaller provinces to continue to be effectively represented in the House. For particularly small provinces such as P. E.I., this may require overrepresentation so that it has a basic level of representation in the House.

The formula provided in our democratic representation bill takes into account these considerations in ensuring the principle of proportionate representation is met fairly and equitably.

I believe it is important for all members and all Canadians to understand exactly what this formula is doing because it is so important for strengthening our democracy. Therefore, I will go through the formula step by step and then put each step within the context of the three objectives I have just discussed.

[*Translation*]

The first step is similar to the current calculation that divides the total provincial population by total provincial seats to determine a national quotient.

The population of each province is then divided by the quotient to determine each province's initial seat allocation based on its population.

The key difference in the bill's formula is that instead of using the number 279 to determine the national quotient—which permanently depresses the number of seats that a fast-growing province can obtain—a gradually escalating number is used.

As I mentioned earlier, the use of 279 in the current formula assumes the House is the same size as it was after the 1971 census and so fast-growing provinces can only gain a proportionate share of this reduced number of seats.

[*English*]

In contrast, the democratic representation bill replaces 279 with the number of provincial seats in the readjustment based on the census of 30 years earlier. For instance, after the 2011 census, the number 292 would be used to determine the national quotient. In the readjustment after the 2021 census, the number 298 would be used, which would be the number of MPs after the census from 30 rather than 50 years ago.

This simple change represents a balance. It permits better growth for faster growing provinces, such as Ontario, while recognizing that this growth needs some moderation to protect the voice of slower growing provinces and to maintain the House itself at a manageable size.

The second step of our formula is unchanged from the current formula. Extra seats are added to provinces under the Senate floor and the 1985 grandfather clause. This recognizes that provinces whose populations may not merit a large number of seats under the representation by population calculation of step one should still have a threshold level of representation that ensures they have an effective voice in the chamber.

In fact, since 1985, Ontario, Alberta and B.C. are the only provinces that have not relied on these floors to maintain their representation in the House.

• (1550)

[*Translation*]

The other provinces receive extra seats under this step and under the Democratic Representation Bill they will continue to keep these seats.

Of course, if these provinces were to grow more rapidly in the future, they would receive additional seats pursuant to the formula.

[*English*]

The third step in our formula aims to achieve fairness. Put simply, it provides that if a province that does not benefit from a constitutional seat floor, yet is smaller than a province that does benefit from a seat floor, that smaller province should be entitled to the same representation as the larger province enjoying the guarantee. This means that we move closer to representation by population while respecting the proportionate representation of the province.

Finally, the last step of adding one seat per territory remains the same under the proposed formula as under the current formula.

In terms of numbers, the democratic representation bill is expected to have the following results, based on population projections for 2011.

All provinces with constitutionally protected floors will keep their current seat counts. Alberta will receive five new seats under the new formula rather than only one under the existing formula. B.C. will receive seven seats rather than only two. Ontario, by virtue of the

Government Orders

new gradually escalating divisor in step one, will receive ten new seats under the readjustment formula rather than only four under the current law. Ontario's representation demonstrably improves under this bill compared to the existing formula.

As I mentioned earlier, it is important to remember that Ontario is now significantly underrepresented under the existing law. The bill being debated today addresses this inequity. The formula in the bill would result in a substantial reduction in the average population of ridings in Ontario. Following the next readjustment of seats, the average constituency population of an Ontario MP would be reduced by more than 6,000 constituents, from 121,588 under the current formula to 115,299 under the formula proposed in this bill, facilitating the ability of MPs to reach out to their constituents and to hear their concerns.

The fact is that under this bill Ontario would receive more seats than any other province and more new seats than any other province, and Ontario would still have the most seats of any province.

Should this bill be defeated, or delayed such that it does not pass, it will mean Ontario will lose the gains that we now propose. Without this bill, Ontario will become increasingly underrepresented as we move into the future. Let us be clear. To oppose this bill is to oppose better representation for Ontario.

For a strong democracy and a strong federation like Canada, the composition of the national legislature must ensure the effective representation of all the provinces, even though they differ significantly in terms of size, geography, history and population growth. This has been the historical approach to representation in the House of Commons since Confederation.

Bill C-22 was introduced in the spirit of that tradition.

In short, the democratic representation bill represents a balanced approach between restoring the principle of representation by population while respecting the constitutionally entrenched principle of proportionate representation of the provinces in the House of Commons.

I would remind this House of Commons of the words of Father of Confederation George Brown in the legislative assembly, our predecessor assembly, on February 8, 1865. A Reformer, as Liberals were then called, and a leading advocate of representation by population, he said the following about the balancing of the representation principles in the soon to be Canadian Constitution:

No constitution ever framed was without defect; no act of human wisdom was ever free from imperfection; no amount of talent and wisdom and integrity combined in preparing such a scheme could have placed it beyond the reach of criticism. And the framers of this scheme had immense special difficulties to overcome. We had the prejudices of race and language and religion to deal with; and we had to encounter all the rivalries of trade and commerce, and all the jealousies of diversified local interests. To assert, then, that our scheme is without fault would be folly. It was necessarily the work of concession....

But Mr. Speaker, admitting all this—admitting all the difficulties that beset us—admitting frankly that defects in the measure exist—I say that, taking the scheme as a whole, it has my cordial enthusiastic support, without hesitation or reservation.

Government Orders

I call on all members of this House to adopt the spirit of George Brown, to recognize that the proposal is a fair and honest effort to strengthen the founding principle of representation by population, while respecting the principle of proportionate representation of the provinces.

The critics of today voice the same arguments as the critics at the time of Confederation, but it was the Fathers of Confederation, not the critics, who built this country, Canada.

• (1555)

I ask the members of the House to rise above sectional or partisan interest, to put Canada first and to strengthen our Confederation. Our democratic representation bill will do exactly that.

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have had the opportunity to read parts of David Smith's book *The People's House of Commons* that is at the Library of Parliament. He is an eminent Saskatchewan political scientist who has said that the triple E cause for the Senate, which the government in part espouses, is really the work of Canada west and a number of academics, but he also posits that the House of Commons is the people's house. Whereas the Senate should represent provincial interests, the House of Commons represents the people's interests and unless we move to a representation by population model, the defenders of voting power disparities between the provinces, which is what this bill creates, may justify the status quo by invoking federalism, but the right to vote is an individual right, not the right of a province.

I would ask the minister to keep that in mind while I ask him two small questions based on his comments inside the House and outside the House. He talked about a manageable size. In interviews, he has said that one of the reasons Ontario is not getting its fair share of seats has something to do with the size of the chamber. I want him to address that issue and clarify it forever.

I also want to know why he, the Minister of Justice, the Minister of the Environment, the Minister of Health and the Minister of Finance, men not without influence in the government, presumably or putatively, cannot convince the government to give Ontario more than the 10 seats it deserves. Are they self-loathing Ontario politicians or do they think that the premier of Ontario is a small man in this Confederation when he says, "I just want for Ontario what it deserves?"

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, we do not propose a pure representation by population formula. The consequence of utilizing a formula like that, which is the logical extension of the formula that Mr. McGuinty appears to espouse, would be to render my friend's province with half the members it currently has and we simply do not believe that should be the case. We have to respect two principles: representation by population and proportionate representation of the provinces.

The fact is that Ontario is the best represented province and it is better represented as a consequence of this bill than is the case under the existing law. I remind my friend that when his party was in government, it twice brought forward bills dealing with this very piece of legislation. It twice brought forward bills dealing with it to accelerate redistribution and the like, yet it made no effort

whatsoever to address the underrepresentation of Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia.

I suspect that the critics have another agenda, a very partisan agenda, an agenda that relates to the fact that they do not want to see these areas of rapid growth that have strong economies enjoy their fair representation in the House of Commons. I suspect that their real objective is to stop this bill in its tracks so that the current unfair distribution can remain in place, harming and hurting the democratic rights of those in British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario.

I read with interest the submission that the premier of Ontario sent to me. It was an interesting submission. It was perhaps 30 pages in length. I was very interested in it because nowhere in that submission whatsoever was there one word that referred to the existing law.

It did not surprise me, frankly, because before we introduced our bill, never once did I find any piece of correspondence or any issue anywhere, any indication from the premier of Ontario that he had a problem with the existing formula. Only when we sought to improve the representation of Ontario did he make complaints. That I found surprising and does not reflect Ontario's interests.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have been interested over the last two days in this issue of democratic reform. I have always been trying to get a real clear answer from anybody as to what the Senate actually does.

Yesterday we were told it protects the rights of minorities. Of course if we go back to John A. Macdonald, when he said "minorities", he meant the rich. He said that there will always be a lot more poor people than rich people, so we have to have a special chamber to protect the interests of the powerful.

Today I hear the Liberals saying that the Senate is there to represent the interests of the provinces. If one were to ask the average Canadian, he or she would say the Senate is there for people who have flipped pancakes at Liberal Party fundraisers for 30 years and they are given basically a life of leisure working two or three days a week.

Where were they last week? They were in New Mexico at a casino. While hard-working Canadians were suffering in -50° weather, the senators were at the casino. If the government was wondering where Bill C-2 was being stalled, it could have put some suntan lotion on the government member's back and he could have gone to try to rouse some of the senators from their pina colada luncheons that are being paid for by the taxpayers of Canada.

People need relief from that crew. Why does the government not just do the simple thing about democratic reform, throw them out, open the other place up as a public basketball court, save the Canadian taxpayers a lot of grief and actually save the embarrassment of having an upper chamber based on party patronage and cronyism in the 21st century?

Government Orders

•(1600)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order. I am not sure about the relevance of the question. My understanding is that the bill has to do with representation in this chamber, but I see the government House leader rising to answer it, so we will give him an opportunity.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, I think those are very worthy comments and in fact they are very relevant because they go to the heart of the nature of the democratic representation we have in both houses of Parliament, the Senate and the House of Commons.

Our view is, of course, that it is important for us to strengthen the democracy, fairness and legitimacy of our House of Commons. We also want to see the legitimacy of the Senate improved. That is why we are proposing changes in terms of term limits and in terms of asking Canadians who they want to represent them in the Senate.

I have much sympathy for the comments made by the member for Timmins—James Bay, but I will take issue with him on one important matter. I do not think 30 years of flipping pancakes at Liberal events is enough to get someone into the Senate. I think they have to go out and raise a lot of that money that the Liberal Party seems to like in order to get that appointment, but that is not what the Senate should be for and that is not how it should operate.

We are seeking to change the Senate, but our government is also very clear on the record. If the entrenched interests of the Liberal Party, the Liberals in the Senate and those various elites of the party who want to protect their interests resist any change—and in our structure they have the ability to do it and they already did it with their Senate term limits—then we will have to look seriously and consider what I know the member for Timmins—James Bay believes, that the Senate should be abolished. If it does not change, that is something that we will have to consider.

That makes it all the more important to support this bill on democratic representation in the House of Commons. We have to ensure that we have a level of representation here that is fair, that is balanced, that allows all provinces to feel that they have a fair share in participating in this country, that allows those rapid growing provinces that are underrepresented right now to enjoy fair and proper representation in the House of Commons.

If we do that, I know that we will be a lot closer to being able to achieve the objective that the member has in mind, if that is where he wants to go.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the government House leader for a great speech and for outlining very clearly the direction we need to go to bring representation by population closer to reality.

I am the member for the riding of Edmonton Centre, which is growing very rapidly and has somewhere between 130,000 and 135,000 constituents now. I can sympathize with folks who have difficulty, who have to work extra hard because of all those people. I would love to have a riding with 30,000 people in it, but that is not the reality.

I wonder if the government House leader could comment on the workload of the average MP with one of those ridings that is growing very rapidly and in fact is overpopulated.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, it is of course one of the imbalances. I know that those of us who serve on the Board of Internal Economy are often wrestling with ways to address the fact that some members of Parliament are being asked to provide services of various types with high numbers of constituents, as many as 170,000 in the case of one constituency. That is a very heavy workload.

When that workload faces a member of Parliament, it is a double problem. First, it is the problem of keeping up with serving one's constituents so that they are provided the same level of services as other members of Parliament elsewhere in the country can provide to their constituents. It also raises an issue of their ability to engage in the other important work of the House of Commons, so that they do have time to engage in debates like this to consider the important legislation in front of us.

That is why it is so important for us to have a healthy, functioning democracy, that each member of Parliament is in a position to perform all aspects of his or her job. That is why we have to have some fairness.

But the most fundamental principle is that of democracy. We want to be closer to the principle that every person's vote in this country counts for the same weight. We know we will never achieve that kind of perfection. It is impossible in a country that is always rapidly growing, where we are always working on a census that is several years behind and the like. That being said, that should not stop us from trying to achieve a better result, from trying to have better representation.

I know there will be critics who will always say it is not perfect. I say to them, what is the solution? We have not heard a proposal from the Liberal Party. Our party has made a clear proposal. It is a proposal that will be better for Canada's democracy.

•(1605)

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there have been some discussions between the parties and, if you were to seek it, I believe there would be unanimous consent for me to split my time with the member for Mississauga—Erindale.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Does the hon. member for Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe have the unanimous consent of the House for him to split his time?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Brian Murphy: Mr. Speaker, I thought it was important to underscore the resentment in Ontario with respect to this legislation.

I respect the constitutional guarantees and the customary guarantees with respect to the provinces that are not growing in size. I come from a province that is not growing in size substantially, partly because it suffered under a Conservative government all these years, but now that will change.

Government Orders

However, it is important to underscore that this is about fairness and this is about the great wrong that is being done to Ontario by this bill. If it were Manitoba, the territories, Prince Edward Island or any other province, I would stand and say the same thing. I would just insert the name of the province that is being wronged. The name of that province that is being wronged today by the introduction of this legislation is Ontario.

Those Ontario MPs who support the bill should have a hard, long look at it or have a good look at their margins to make sure they are safe in the next election.

[*Translation*]

The objective of Bill C-22, which was introduced for the first time in the last session, is to amend the formula provided in the Constitution for adjusting the number of seats for each province in the House of Commons. The bill has been tabled pursuant to the powers conferred on Parliament under section 44 of the Constitution Act, 1982. The Constitution assigns to the House the duty of amending the provisions in the Constitution relating to the House of Commons.

By suggesting an equitable representation of rapidly growing provinces, while protecting the seats of those provinces which are growing more slowly, or not at all, such as New Brunswick, the proposed formula conforms to the “principle of proportionate representation of the provinces” described in paragraph 42(1)(a) of the Constitution Act, 1982.

The new formula set out in the bill would restore the proportional representation of British Columbia and Alberta, and would somewhat improve Ontario’s representation, but a problem would still remain. We have no argument with this formula and this bill in terms of the interests of British Columbia or Alberta. As far as we are concerned, it is fine.

Under this new formula for an expanded House of Commons, only 10 seats will be allocated to Ontario. That is not enough. At the same time, like many others, I fear that this bill will weaken the representation of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Quebec and the Atlantic Provinces, including New Brunswick. Our presence in this House is a sign that we follow the principal of representation by population. The other chamber, the Senate, protects the interests of the provinces and minorities. Their formula for representation is perhaps not as equitable in representing the provinces since their representation is based not on population but on regions.

I am very concerned by the fact that the government is proposing to change the representation in this House but not in the Senate. When it says that there are not enough seats in this House for British Columbia and Alberta—that is true—it does not mention that in the Senate, British Columbia and Alberta have only six seats. What are they doing about Senate representation for the two provinces that are at the heart of this bill? Perhaps the government has forgotten those provinces.

• (1610)

[*English*]

Before I discuss the problems with the government’s attitude toward the Senate and before we get to those bills which seek to go with the Canada west dream of an elected Senate, which is what I

think this government wants, there are many people over there hiding in a closet who really want to abolish the Senate.

We heard that when we listened to the remarks made by that minister. That minister has grown quite a bit of support for the concept that the Conservative Party now feels and believes, and will run on the abolition of the Senate. That is its prerogative, but we now know its real position. The Conservatives are aided with at least the NDP, who will never govern and never make a change like this anyway. At least the NDP stands up for what it believes in and it wants the Senate abolished.

I wonder why the government is standing up and saying that it is going to reform the Senate a little bit here and there when it really wants to abolish it. It is the same card game going on here. The Conservatives say they want to institute a formula that is fair to everyone. In this case what fair means is Alberta and British Columbia are going to get more seats. The government never knows what it will give Ontario. It is pretty red. One year I think it went 99 seats out of 101 seats red. That is a bad colour for those guys over there.

Where the government is giving 10 seats, it is a bit like going trick or treating. The government has its bag and it is all excited and the Premier of Ontario is at the door, and he gets an apple with a razor blade in it. Is he supposed to say thanks for that apple? The Premier of Ontario is supposed to get the treats that everyone gets when something like that happens.

For Ontario members and ministers in the front row who clearly are being run by their Alberta colleagues, including the Prime Minister, to go home from this trick or treat and be happy is naive. They are not representing their province and they should be ashamed of themselves for not standing up. They should stand up for Ontario.

What I stand up for is fairness. We on the Liberal side stand for fairness. Yes, Alberta and British Columbia should get the seats that their population shows they deserve. Yes to Alberta and yes to British Columbia. Yes to all the other provinces whose seats will not be diminished. Yes to the territories which deserve better and more representation.

We say no to the proposal with respect to Ontario. Why penalize Ontario? I do not represent Ontario. There are an awful lot of Ontario people who have moved to Moncton, New Brunswick of course because it is a land of opportunity and we are a cosmopolitan region.

I represent the riding of Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe. Of course, I am pleased that our seats were not diminished. That is great. But what is important to me in any concept of the discussion of Confederation is that we all be treated equally.

If the Conservatives are attacking Ontario today, who is to say that they might not attack New Brunswick tomorrow. I stand in solidarity with the Premier of Ontario and the MPs from Ontario, who will say throughout this debate, the ones with guts and fortitude and who care about their province, that this is wrong. I stand with the many scholars who say it is wrong.

Government Orders

I stand with the general principle of democratic reform because despite the label over there, the minister in his 20-minute speech did not answer or respond or at least presage an argument that has to be: where is the consultation? Where is the consultation that the minister and the government had with the provinces?

That consultation is in the public I guess and it is called name-calling, bullying, intimidation and disrespect. That minister and that government should not speak to the partners in Confederation that way. That is disgraceful and more than that, it is not productive. How can he say to this House that he has consulted with all the premiers and all the ministers responsible for intergovernmental affairs, and has a consensus as to how we should proceed with respect to representation by population?

How can that minister stand in this place, when he is quoted as saying that one of the reasons we cannot put more Ontario MPs in this place is because we may not have enough room on the floor of the House? What other excuse is he going to come up with next? We wonder if that member over there representing democratic reform is some sort of undemocratic reform initiative proposer and he is about to say that we are going to really come true to ourselves and say that if people vote Conservative they will be given more seats, but if they do not, they will not.

•(1615)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I should set the record straight on a couple of things.

First, Canada west, of course, historically refers not to the western provinces but to the old province of Ontario. I thought I would correct my friend because I know he wants Canadians to know he is aware of the realities.

In terms of the reason why we have allowed Ontario to grow under its divisor but are not providing the bump up provided by other provinces is a very simple one: the principle of proportionate representation of the provinces.

Right now, Quebec benefits from a seat floor, so those that are smaller than Quebec have some legitimate reason to expect the same kind of representation as a province that has a guarantee.

However, the effect of doing what my friend has just said and agree with Dalton McGuinty, the Premier of Ontario, and apply the exact same formula to them, would be to render the guarantee that Quebec enjoys today meaningless and ineffective. It will have wiped out the principle of proportionate representation of the provinces insofar as Quebec is concerned.

I want to ask the hon. member a very simple question and I want him to be clear. Does he agree with Dalton McGuinty's approach and is that the position of the Liberal Party? This is a yes or no answer because that position is to render Quebec's guarantee ineffective. Is that the position of the Liberal Party of Canada? I would like to know, yes or no.

Mr. Brian Murphy: Mr. Speaker, what we have heard from that minister is that he agrees that his proposal is unfair. He said Ontario is not getting its just number of seats. He does not cite any study and he does not have any authority for the concept that Quebec's constitutional guarantee will be undermined.

Until I hear further evidence, and this minister never presents any evidence, the Premier of Ontario is correct. He is correct when he says that Ontario should get more seats.

Whether the number is 10, 16, 12, 24 or 83, I do not know. I am not in government. That minister is. I am not in charge of bringing forward bills, but if I were, and I hope that day comes soon, we would do it fairly and we will have a meeting with our counterparts.

This minister is afraid of his counterparts. Let him ask and answer the question, did he sit with all of the provincial premiers and get those figures from them? No, he is afraid of them.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my hon. Liberal colleague.

Yesterday, the Liberals said they would be more than willing to look at the Senate, but it is not the time. Why should we be looking at the Senate? We have other things to worry about. Today, they are saying, why have we not looked at the Senate.

The hon. member is perpetuating the myth again that the Senate actually has a function. The function he claims looks after regional interests. He does not address the fact that the Senate is there for party loyalty.

Senators have written themselves a code of ethics where they are allowed to sit on the board of directors of major corporations, including oil and gas, income trusts, telecommunications, all areas of private health concerns that are regulated by the federal government, and under their code of ethics, they can participate and influence debate where they or their families have financial interests.

The Liberal Party would hardly disapprove of that. They have allowed the system to go on for years. Why does the member not at least have the political courage to say yes, we have friends in the upper House. We had to give them those positions as payback for the years we have allowed them to run amok doing interference and influence peddling for their own private interests, but they are not there representing the—

•(1620)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order, please. I have a copy of the bill in my hand. There is nothing in the bill that has to do with Senate representation. According to the rules, we are supposed to stick to the substance of the bill. There is enough time for a brief question and comment. The hon. member for Nanaimo—Alberni.

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has put forward that somehow Ontario is being hurt by the legislation. He should do the math. He may have heard the parliamentary secretary say the average MP afterwards would have 115,000 constituents compared to 121,000 today. They currently have 106 out of 308 seats. That is roughly 34.4%. Under the new formula, they would have 35.1%. What part of that hurts the most?

Government Orders

Mr. Brian Murphy: Mr. Speaker, what hurts, and as I say, it is not about Ontario. It happens to be about Ontario because it is targeted by the government this time, but it could be New Brunswick next time. It could be some other province.

The point is, what is fair is fair. If we have growth in three provinces in Canada, the number of seats put in the package that those provinces should have should be fair. For these ministers, who are supposedly so powerful, to hide behind the skirt of Alberta leaders in the front row must be very embarrassing. I cannot wait to explain that during a campaign to the people in their ridings—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order, please. The hon. member has run out of time for his questions and comments. There is quite a lot of noise and it is becoming increasingly difficult to hear hon. members.

I see the hon. government House leader is rising on a point of order.

* * *

EMERGENCY DEBATE

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I believe there have been discussions among the parties relating to the emergency debate tonight and I trust you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, when the House begins proceedings under the provisions of Standing Order 52 later this day, no quorum calls, requests for unanimous consent or dilatory motions shall be received by the Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Does the hon. government House leader have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

THE CONSTITUTION ACT, 2007 (DEMOCRATIC REPRESENTATION)

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-22, An Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867 (Democratic representation), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Omar Alghabra (Mississauga—Erindale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to speak to Bill C-22, the bill that the House leader has just admitted to the public is unfair to Ontario.

I will begin my remarks by reading into the record excerpts of letters that my premier, Dalton McGuinty, the Premier of Ontario, had consistently written to the Prime Minister when this bill was Bill C-56. The first letter was sent on June 4, 2007 and it reads:

Dear Prime Minister:

1) I am writing to express my concern about Bill C-56, which your government introduced on May 11, 2007.

As you know, this new legislation will change the formula for readjusting seats among the provinces in the House of Commons and is intended to implement your promise made during the last election to "restore representation by population for Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta in the House of Commons while protecting the seat counts of smaller provinces.

I must express my surprise that this legislation does not honour your commitment to the people of Ontario, although does so for the people of British Columbia and Alberta - and for the seven other provinces. Under the proposed legislation, Canadians in Ontario will continue to be significantly under-represented, and we will be the only Canadians who do not enjoy one of the most basic democratic rights: fair representation by population.

I am concerned that your minister has misunderstood the consequences of this legislation for the people of Ontario. He has indicated in public on several occasions that it represents substantial progress for Canadians living in Ontario. This is simply untrue. I am attaching the seat projections anticipated under this legislation.

As you can see, despite the fact that Ontario will gain additional seats, the gap between our share of seats and our share of population will continue to grow. The federal government's legislation, which we presumed would rectify a long-standing injustice, will, in fact, make the problem worse.

This means Ontario's growing population will not be adequately represented. Ultimately, the size of Ontario's constituencies will grow even larger. For example, under Bill C-56, both Alberta and British Columbia will get a new seat in the readjustment following the 2011 Census for every increase of approximately 100,000 people. However, Ontario will get only one new seat for roughly every 200,000 people. Ontarians would become increasingly under-represented with each new readjustment following future censuses.

I do not believe that your government or minister, in all good conscience, would introduce legislation that attempts to entrench in the Constitution a formula that so clearly disenfranchises Canadians living in Ontario - and only Canadians living in Ontario. Other Canadians will see their representation keep pace with or surpass their province's population, but Canadians in Ontario will not. I cannot believe that this is what your government intends.

Another letter dated September 16, 2007 reads:

Dear Prime Minister:

I noted with interest your address to the Australian Parliament on September 11, and agree with your description of democracy as "an instinctive sense of fairness, self-restraint and compromise.

It was my concern over the lack of fairness in the treatment of Ontario voters contained in Bill C-56 that prompted my letter to you on June 4.

I call on you now, as I did then, to restore representation by population in the House of Commons, and I continue to urge you to make a simple amendment to Bill C-56 so that Canadians in Ontario receive the same treatment as those in British Columbia and Alberta. Based on current population and future projections, the people of Ontario are entitled to at least 10 more seats than anticipated in your legislation.

I note that you have prorogued Parliament and will begin a new session in October. In the spirit of starting anew, I suggest that now would be a good time to consider amending Bill C-56 prior to its reintroduction in the House of Commons to take into account Ontario's fundamental concerns.

• (1625)

I have another letter dated November 22, 2007, which states:

On November 14, 2007, the federal government introduced Bill C-22, an Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867, which will change the number of seats in the House of Commons. This bill is of great concern to me, to our government, and should be of concern to all Ontarians. I want to ensure that all Members of Parliament from Ontario understand these concerns.

Government Orders

If this bill passes, it will weaken democratic representation for Canadians living in Ontario by granting us fewer seats than we are entitled to in the House of Commons. In its current form, Bill C-22 undermines some of our most cherished democratic rights: representation by population, "one person, one vote," equality under the law and effective representation.

During the 2006 federal election campaign, the Conservative Party promised to "restore representation by population for Ontario, British Columbia, and Alberta in the House of Commons while protecting the seat counts of smaller provinces." Bill C-22 breaks that commitment.

I could go on reading these letters. There is also an attachment of the projections that I will be happy to table in the House of Commons so Canadians can actually see what the legislation is proposing.

The government is conducting itself in a bizarre manner. The government has falsely claimed that it will end the bickering between provinces. What has it ended up doing? I have ended up insulting Canadians, insulting the provinces and breaking its commitments to the provinces. We are not just talking about Bill C-22. We are talking about the Atlantic accord, child care, the environment and infrastructure funding. All of those things have been completely terminated.

The Prime Minister has yet to hold a first ministers meeting with the premiers. He invited them over for dinner for a couple of hours of discussion where he told them what he was going to do whether they liked it or not, but he has never held constructive consultation with the premiers.

The minister himself admitted that this bill has flaws. I agree with him, but I would have given him more credit if he had come to us with a proposal after consulting with the premiers and with Canadians. If the government had put forward an effort before proposing the bill, we would have been able to engage in a constructive debate. It then could have told Canadians that it had tried.

However, now the government is saying that it knows it is not perfect but that it is trying. It is trying at the expense of Ontarians. It is trying without consulting anyone and without even appearing to be consultative. The government is shameless. It tries to pretend that it is all for democratic reform but it is afraid of Ontarians and of Canadians. It will need to explain that to the population of Ontario and to Canadians in the next election. It will need to stand and tell Canadians that it did not consult them because it knew what was best for them, that it knew how to conduct its business and everyone must accept it without arguing.

The government does not care about the people of Ontario. It does not care about Canadians. It only cares about its own agenda. All it wants to do is make change via stealth. It does not want anyone to know what the hell it is doing.

An hon. member: Hey, no four letter words. Wash your mouth out with soap, goddamn.

• (1630)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order, please. There is quite a lot of noise coming from a certain side of the House. The hon. member for Mississauga—Erindale has only a minute left. If we can just let him get through that and then we can move on to questions and comments.

Mr. Omar Alghabra: Mr. Speaker, all the government knows how to do is insult but not consult. The government forgets that it only has a minority government. It will need to face Canadians in the next election.

The Minister of the Environment must remember where his seat is. He will be facing Ontarians in the next election. Not only will he need to explain the budget, not only will he need to explain his performance as the Minister of the Environment and not only will he need to explain his record under Mike Harris, he will need to explain his support for this flawed bill.

The Conservative government is shameless. It needs to go back to the drawing board. It needs to consult with the premiers and with its counterparts and then we will be able to have a constructive discussion. As it stands, the bill is unfair not only to Ontarians but to all Canadians.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, apparently, members of the party opposite do not just have problems writing their own questions for committee, they have problems writing their own speeches.

I was very interested to listen to Dalton McGuinty's speech in the House. It did not sound quite like his voice, but is that the same Dalton McGuinty who denied representation by population to his own province in northern Ontario?

Will my hon. colleague vote to deprive Ontario of 10 more seats, yes or no?

Mr. Omar Alghabra: Mr. Speaker, the member does not want to debate the bill. He wants to debate issues of provincial jurisdiction. When the Conservatives table a bill on Ontario I will be happy to debate it. Right now we are debating Bill C-22 and the member from Alberta is in no position to speak up on behalf of Ontario.

I want to hear from the ministers and members from that caucus who are from Ontario. In the next election, how will they explain to Canadians who live in Ontario why they are supporting this flawed, unfair bill?

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member now not only purports to speak for his own constituents in Mississauga—Erindale, but he is purporting that the bill is bad for all Canadians.

Maybe the member has heard of other provinces in the country, which have been growing like Ontario, such as British Columbia and Alberta, that have been under-represented for years under the old formula, even as Ontario is currently under-represented in the House.

I want to ask the member the question I asked his colleague a few minutes earlier. The Liberals are saying that Ontario is a big loser here. I want to repeat that under the current formula, Ontario has 34.4% of the seats in the House. Under the new formula, it would have 35.1%. It seems to me that is more than it used to be. The figures go from 121,000 constituents per member of Parliament currently from Ontario to 115,000 per member. That is about 6,000 less. That would be 10 more seats for Ontario in this House.

Government Orders

Therefore, Ontario would have a higher percentage of seats, fewer constituents per member, more members per population and 10 new seats in the House. That is win, win, win. What part of win does the member have a hard time understanding?

• (1635)

Mr. Omar Alghabra: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member does not understand why even other Canadians will not like this bill. They know that when unfairness is applied to one Canadian, even though they may not be affected by it today, tomorrow the government could introduce something that will be unfair to them. If they do not take my word, they can take the word of Premier Danny Williams. He tells Canadians that if the government can do this to him, that it can do this tomorrow to them.

I will give the hon. member some numbers. Right now, Ontario has a 38% share of the population. By 2011, it is projected to have 39.4% of the population. The 10 seats the Conservatives are talking about does not come close. It is only 50% of what is needed to address the growth in the population of Ontario.

We agree that Alberta and British Columbia should have fair representation but what is fair is fair. Ontario deserves to have its fair share and we will stand up for Ontarians as we stand up for all Canadians.

Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, is it not a fact that Conservative members on the other side do not make a move without polling and wasting \$31 million of taxpayer money? Is it not also a fact that they are concerned that if they do give fair representation to Ontarians they will not get their highly desired, coveted majority?

Mr. Omar Alghabra: Mr. Speaker, my colleague raises an interesting point. It is impossible to avoid that point. The Conservatives know that Ontarians are not warm to their government. They know that Ontarians do not like the Conservatives. Even the Minister of the Environment remembers that.

If the government had consulted, had done the studies and had done its homework, it would have disarmed us from any opposition. We would have had very little to say if it had done its homework. However, the government, in an ad hoc manner, is trying to change the Constitution without extensive consultation on the backs of Ontarians.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have mixed feelings at the beginning of my speech on Bill C-22. On the one hand, I am extremely proud to rise and protect the representation of the Quebec nation in the House and express my total opposition to Bill C-22. On the other, though, I have a hard time understanding the Conservatives' obsession with repeatedly returning with bills they think are democratic pseudo-reforms.

Earlier this week, we considered the Senate consultation bill. As I said, these bills are not really priorities in my view. In the case of the Senate, we should be talking instead about abolishing an institution inherited from the British monarchy and colonial times. Bill C-22, which we are considering today, is totally at odds with the House's and Canada's recognition of the Quebec nation. Instead of talking about this kind of thing, I would have preferred to be here debating a bill to increase the assistance for the manufacturing and forestry

industries—something that our fellow citizens need much more urgently than some review of the representation in the House of Commons or an attempt to revamp an irrelevant and completely outmoded institution like the Senate.

We could have been debating the proposals brought forward by the Bloc Québécois over the last few weeks to establish a technological partnership. This program used to exist, but the Conservatives killed it. It could be a \$500 million program to encourage technological innovation. There is also the \$1.5 billion loan program to help companies procure new equipment, as well as the \$1.5 billion investment in the employment insurance fund, especially to establish an income support program for older workers.

Last year, 50,000 jobs were lost in Quebec. Jobs were lost in manufacturing of course. Some 150,000 have been lost over the last five years, most of them since the Conservatives came to power. There is an urgent need, therefore, to debate this plan and implement it.

Instead of that, there are bills being put before us this week, as I said, proposing a pseudo-democratic reform. As I said, I am of two minds. I would have preferred to discuss a plan to improve things for the manufacturing and forestry industries. Now that we have to discuss Bill C-22, I am extremely proud to see that the Bloc Québécois members are the only ones in this House standing up for Quebec's interests. Even the members in the other parties who come from Quebec are not taking that approach. I would not say they do not have that courage, because that is not their mission. They are here to stand up for Canada and not to stand up for the interests of the Quebec nation. It is unfortunate, however, to see that in this case they are living up to their reputation. The only ones who care truly and without compromise about standing up for the interests of the Quebec nation are the Bloc Québécois members. I believe that the debate on Bill C-22 will provide further evidence of the need for a party like ours here in this House. Its value is undeniable, since no one else here is standing up for the interests of the Quebec nation.

We may well look at Bill C-22 from every angle and every side, and argue about how the various provinces are to be represented based on the changing demographics of Canada, but one thing will remain: objectively, this bill would marginalize the Quebec nation in terms of its position in federal institutions, and in particular, in this case, in the House of Commons.

Government Orders

For example, with the proposal before us, we will in fact be preserving the 75 members for the Quebec nation in this House, but since the total number of members is being increased, the proportion that the members from Quebec represent will fall from 24.4% to 22.7%. Obviously, that will continue, because as we know there is an economic boom happening in western Canada that is attracting large numbers of people who are coming either from the other provinces or from outside the country. So today it is being proposed that we go a step farther, because there have been other steps taken in the past, to marginalize the Quebec nation in the House of Commons.

The House of Commons has recognized the Quebec nation. Canada and the Canadian nation have recognized that there is a nation that is called the Quebec nation.

• (1640)

We have to ensure that the political weight of the Quebec nation is preserved over time.

I would remind the House that in 1840 the Act of Union brought together Upper Canada and Lower Canada, even though Lower Canada had no debt at the time—as I recall—and was much more populous. Lower Canada and its representatives agreed that Upper Canada, which had a large debt that was absorbed and a smaller population, would have exactly the same number of elected members. The people's representatives at that time believed that there were truly two founding peoples who were coming together in a union.

I recall the speech I have read in which the representatives of Lower Canada, while recognizing that the population of Lower Canada was larger, agreed, in order to create this common political landscape, that Upper Canada would have the same number of representatives as they had.

That is the spirit that should guide all the parties in this House. They must recognize that within the Canadian political landscape there are at least two nations. In fact, there are more than that because there are also our first nations and, in my view, the Acadian nation. At present, they are not asking for any representation. That is their problem. But we feel that it is necessary to ensure that the representation of the Quebec nation, regardless of the distribution formula that may be used, is not reduced and is maintained at 25%.

That is the gist of the remarks that we will be making in the next few days. We are not talking about a province. Quebec is not a province. The Quebec state and territory are the seat of a nation that must be heard in the House of Commons; that must also have a relationship of equals with the Canadian nation. That is the great problem of Canada. It is not relations between Quebec and Canada that are the problem. It is not Quebec that causes problems in Canada as a whole. The problem is that Canada was founded on the illusion that it was made up of 10 provinces that are all equal in law and all the same, which is not true.

Canada is made up of many nations within the Canadian political landscape. It is the lack of recognition of this multinational reality that has caused a crisis in Canada for at least 30 years. The proof is right here in this House. The Conservatives are strong in the west; the Liberals are strong in Ontario; the Bloc has represented the majority of Quebec for several elections—five, if memory serves—

and the NDP is all over the map. But, there is currently no pan-Canadian party. There are regional parties that defend different realities.

Had we recognized the existence of different nations within the Canadian political landscape and tried to build a political structure around that, perhaps there would not be the continuing crisis, decade after decade. Now, it is too late.

There have been attempts to tinker with the system during recent years. I am thinking of the Charlottetown and the Meech Lake accords. Now, it is very clear to more and more Quebecers that the future lies with sovereignty for Quebec; that is a 100% repatriation of our political powers. It is not enough to try to protect, as I am now doing, 25% representation in the House of Commons.

In the meantime, however, as long as we are within the Canadian political landscape, as long as we are paying taxes to the federal government, we must ensure that we are heard as a nation and that we have the necessary representation. In our view, 25% is minimal. That now represents more or less Quebec's population within Canada. Thus, Quebec would have the opportunity to have its say here.

This goes completely against the motion adopted here. In fact, I repeat, they are trying to address the question of electoral representation through the lens of 10 provinces that must have more or less equitable representation in terms of the ratio between the member and the population represented. That is not what we are talking about, nor what we should be talking about. Instead, we should be talking about ensuring that, within each of these nations, there is adequate representation to reflect the reality of all regions of Canada and Quebec.

In that sense, if certain regions of Canada ask to have greater representation because their population has grown, so be it.

• (1645)

We should redistribute the seats for the entire Canadian nation to reflect the current reality. Otherwise, if we increase the number of seats for western Canada or Ontario, we must ensure that the 25% Quebec representation is maintained and proportionally increase that representation. Any number of formulas are possible, but for us, this is non negotiable. As long as we are part of Canada, we must ensure that the voice of the Quebec people can be adequately heard. That means we need a minimum representation of 25% in this House.

I would remind the House that if the government, the Prime Minister and the other Canadian parties were to be consistent with the decision they made to recognize the Quebec nation, they would have no problem voting in favour of the bill introduced by my hon. colleague from Drummond, a bill that aims to ensure that Bill 101 applies to businesses in Quebec under federal jurisdiction. But no, it is beyond comprehension. Yet it is very simple and represents perhaps 8% of the labour force that, at present, is excluded from the application of Bill 101. This could give a boost to francization in Quebec, which has lost momentum in the past few years.

Government Orders

Today I introduced a bill to exempt Quebec from the application of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act. Its vision of integration, assimilation and the manner in which we receive immigrants is not at all shared by Quebec. Canada's approach to integration and immigrants is very Anglo-Saxon. In fact, Canada's model is exactly the same as Great Britain's. I respect that, if that is what Canada wishes to do. We are not interested in adding ethnic groups to the Québécois nation. On the contrary, we believe that every citizen who has chosen to come to Quebec has a contribution to make. This contribution must enrich the common culture and make it possible to forge a nation whose language is French and whose culture is Québécois. This culture consists of the contributions of all citizens who make up this nation, a specific history and a territory that belongs to this nation. We call this interculturalism. It is not the Anglo-Saxon model adopted by Canada. There must be respect for the fact that Quebec, within the Canadian political landscape, constitutes a nation recognized by Canada and by the House of Commons, and can adopt a different model, which will not be thwarted by this desire for multiculturalism, which has plagued Ottawa since the Trudeau era.

It is clear that Bill C-22 completely contradicts the interests of the Quebec nation and the recognition of the Quebec nation by the House of Commons, by the Canadian nation. It should be withdrawn altogether by this government, which is what the Quebec National Assembly is calling for. I will remind hon. members that on May 16, 2007, the National Assembly unanimously adopted a motion. The National Assembly is made up of federalists and sovereigntists—all people who fully recognize there is a nation. It is not like here, in Ottawa, where it is simply a symbolic gesture. The motion reads as follows:

THAT the National Assembly ask the Parliament of Canada to withdraw Bill C-56, An Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867, introduced in the House of Commons last 11 May;

THAT the National Assembly also ask the Parliament of Canada to withdraw Bill C-43, An Act to provide for consultations with electors on their preferences for appointments to the Senate, whose primary purpose is to change the method of selection of senators without the consent of Québec.

Bill C-56, as the bill was known before the session was prorogued, is now Bill C-22, An Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867 (Democratic representation). We discussed Bill C-43 at the beginning of the week. Now, Bill C-20 would essentially change the method of selection of senators without the consent of Quebec.

In Quebec, federalists and sovereignists alike agree that Bill C-22 and Bill C-20 are not in Quebec's best interest and undermine the House of Commons' recognition of the Quebec nation.

Consequently, I will submit to the House an amendment to Bill C-20, seconded by the member for Terrebonne—Blainville, that reads as follows:

That the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word "That" and substituting the following:

This House decline to give second reading to Bill C-22, An Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867 (Democratic representation), because the bill would reduce the political weight of the Quebec nation in the House of Commons in an unacceptable manner and does not provide that 25 percent of the elected members of the House of Commons must come from Quebec.

Mr. Speaker, with your permission, I will table this amendment.

• (1650)

In conclusion, the Minister responsible for Intergovernmental Affairs summed up what all Quebeckers think about this when he said that as long as we are part of the Canadian political landscape—and this is a federalist talking—we must ensure that the Quebec nation has, at the very least, the minimum representation it needs to make itself heard by the Canadian nation.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The amendment is in order.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe.

• (1655)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciated the member's speech on Bill C-22, but I would like to ask him a few questions to clarify his position. I understand that the Government of Quebec is very concerned about this government's democratic reform agenda. This means that it does not support this bill, Bill C-20 or Bill C-19.

Just so I understand, I would like to know the Bloc's position on this. It is against this bill because it wants Quebec to be recognized as a nation.

Are there any other reasons it is opposed to this bill and to the fact that the government does not consult the provinces, including Quebec? Premier Charest said that we needed to consult before changing the Senate and the number of seats in the House of Commons.

Does the member think it is a good idea for this government, or any federal government, to consult the provinces, including Quebec, about such changes and their implementation?

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, I said so during my speech on Bill C-20. The National Assembly, Mr. Pelletier, the Minister for Canadian Intergovernmental Affairs, and Mr. Charest were very clear on this: the government cannot change any mechanisms pertaining to representation, whether in the Senate or the House of Commons, without consultation or constitutional amendments. This is especially true when it comes to the Senate.

Consequently, any vote we have here, especially on Bill C-20, will cause a huge constitutional wrangle. If we open the Constitution to talk about the Senate, as I said yesterday, we will also open it to talk about other aspects that are much more important to Quebec as a nation. I mentioned some of these aspects concerning the application of Bill 101, the Canadian Multiculturalism Act and many other things.

I will close with the second issue that I feel is very important. There is a consensus in Quebec. On May 17, 2007, Benoît Pelletier, the Minister for Canadian Intergovernmental Affairs and a federalist, said this:

Government Orders

I appreciate that the House is based on proportional representation. But I wonder whether there might be special measures to protect Quebec, which represents the main linguistic minority in Canada, is a founding province of Canada and is losing demographic weight. Why could Quebec not be accommodated because of its status as a nation and a national minority within Canada?

While I do not agree with the idea of remaining within Canada, the federalists agree with the sovereigntists: as long as we are part of the Canadian political landscape, the nation of Quebec must have guaranteed representation so that it can make its voice heard, and the federal government and the nation of Canada must respect the tools necessary for Quebec's development.

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague and I certainly disagree about the position of the Bloc Québécois in the House of Commons.

I am interested, however, having watched what the government brought forth in terms of adding seats without a clear consultative process, in what that will mean for other regions of the country.

I was actually quite surprised by the position of the Liberal Party today, which seems to be a bit of a red book for electoral reform. They will promise every region whatever it wants in order to seem like they actually have a plan.

However, we are hearing about 20 seats in Ontario being supported by the Liberal Party ad hoc. We see the numbers in the west. Certainly there is an issue of ensuring fair representation in these regions, but how does the member think this is going to end up being reconciled with the historic compromise of maintaining 25% seats in Quebec and the fact that neither that party nor the governing party has actually addressed that in the bill?

Does the member not think that by not first having addressed the issue about how we actually look at our historic balance in the House of Commons, based on historic principles, and then starting to move in a very consultative manner to ensure that the new seats are brought in with a fair and open manner, that it is not just going to open up another constant—

• (1700)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order. I am sorry to interrupt, but I have to allow the hon. member enough time to respond.

The hon. member for Joliette.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question.

We are currently involved in a debate about fundamentals. It is all well and good that the Canadian nation has recognized the Quebec nation, but it is time to walk the walk. This debate on Bill C-22 gives us the opportunity to take concrete action by saying that even if we increase the number of seats for Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia, we will ensure that the Quebec nation retains its current level of representation, about 25%, in the House of Commons. That would be a concrete and respectful response to Canada's multi-national character.

Unfortunately, I do not expect the Canadian parties to agree with that. As I mentioned, the idea of Canada is based on the illusion of 10 equal provinces that all have the same rights. One size fits all, coast to coast, *a mari usque ad mare*. I would like to point out that this supposed equality among the provinces in no way reflects reality. For example, Prince Edward Island has three times more members of Parliament per voter than Quebec. An exception, a reasonable accommodation, was made for Prince Edward Island, which is a province like all others within the Canadian nation, so why not make a more than reasonable accommodation for the Quebec nation?

It is easy to see what Canada is all about, and it is clear that there is no future in that system, as we used to say in my youth.

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first I want to congratulate my colleague from Joliette on his very germane speech, which reflected the prevailing view in Quebec very accurately as well as the original intent of the Fathers of Confederation, who wanted to create a balance. As the hon. member said, even though Lower Canada had a larger population at the time, it agreed to what was then equal representation.

This bill implies that numerical strength is a function of the population of each part of Canada, but that was not the case originally. The intent at the time was to ensure fair representation for a distinct society, which is now Quebec, because it was distinct.

I want to ask my colleague the following question. Apart from the representation of sheer numbers and the fact that the various political options are represented, is there not something else at work here that is very harmful to Quebec? For quite a few years now, two-thirds of the members from Quebec have represented the Bloc Québécois. However, some of the Quebec members are working against its interest in having fair representation. This can be seen, as the hon. member said earlier, in the motions on the recovery plan for the manufacturing and forestry industries. I would like to know what my colleague has to say about this.

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Chambly—Borduas for his very pointed question.

We need to remember that insofar as political representation in the House of Commons is concerned, Quebec has always been disadvantaged by the rules instituted over the years by the majority of members. The last time there was a change, in 1985, the Conservatives were in power as well. It was the time of the *beau risque*. As a result of the change, however, 48 members have been added to the House of Commons since 1985, but not one from Quebec.

Government Orders

As we can see, there are procedures in place to ultimately marginalize the Quebec nation within federal institutions. The House's and Canada's recognition of the Quebec nation should lead the hon. members to agree to ensure that a minimum of 25% of the members come from the nation of Quebec. These members should reflect the debate that has been going on in Quebec for at least 30 years. If we go back further in time, it was already there. I am speaking of the debate between those who think that the best solution for Quebec is to repatriate 100% of the powers, in other words the sovereignists, and those who think we should content ourselves with a continually shrinking piece of the pie, that is to say unfortunately, the federalists and their counterparts in Quebec as well.

● (1705)

[English]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to rise today and speak to Bill C-22. I will say at the outset that this is a very flawed bill. This appears to be the week that the Conservative government has decided to deal with democratic reform.

I think it needs to be put very clearly that the government is putting a little bit of paint on a leaky old boat and trying to pass it off as the new *Bluenose*. The reality is that this House does need steps toward democratic reform. I think we will hear from the debate that there is a lack of consensus. There are the questions of the provinces where we are certainly dealing with a Gordian knot any time we decide to change the Constitution Act and open up the change of how we deal with democracy.

If we are going to take this step, then let us not tinker, but let us do it right. Clearly, the New Democratic Party has been pushing for a clear move toward democratic reform. In the last session that included cleaning up the corrupt way that government has been run and cleaning up election finances.

We now see that the recidivism rate by our friends in the Liberal Party, when dealing with election financing is still appalling. We will certainly need to keep leading them by the hand. Certainly, we have to clean up election financing so that the corruption and abuse of this House cannot continue. That was one key element of the act. Clearly, after tonight's fundraiser with the goaltenders and the golf players, there is some more remedial work to be done with the Liberals.

The second element of democratic reform is much more long term. It is the need to actually move toward a system of fair and open proportional representation, so that people in Canada actually feel their votes are being counted.

We know that all across Canada, with the first past the post system, many people live in an area where one party will win by a very large majority. In other areas there are people who want to vote for other parties, small parties, fringe parties, it does not matter. People often wonder why they should vote and what is the point of voting. A system of proportional representation is something we need to start addressing if we are going to move toward a 21st century democracy.

The third element of democratic reform is the need to abolish the Senate. The Conservative members have brought forward sugges-

tions about electing senators. At the end of the day, once we try and work our way through all the various conflicting constitutional problems of getting simple reform, and when we deal with the fact that this upper chamber is defiant and in our face about its refusal to reform themselves to any degree, we know that any attempts to move toward an elected Senate will drag on for years.

Of course our colleagues across the way in the Liberal Party will certainly help the senators in dragging their feet. We know that the Senate has been a dumping ground for political patronage, cronies and hacks of the leading parties.

This has nothing to do with the fact that there are certainly some good senators and that some senators can, on a given day, do some very good work. It is not the basis of a system of government in the 21st century that we have someone who is chosen for life without any review or any real sanction to actually have to deliver.

One of the political fibs that was being floated today on why we have the Senate was brought forward by Liberal members. The Liberals said that senators were there to represent the regions. They said that senators had an important role representing regional concerns.

This is what the Vancouver *Sun* said on November 9, 2007, "The Senate is a symbol of political failure in Canada. It should be abolished".

Certainly, I guess people in B.C. were not thinking very highly about senators representing the region. I will add to that what Premier Gordon Campbell of British Columbia said, "The critical thing for us in British Columbia is that there is proper representation and the Senate is not even close to being properly representative of the west". And he thinks it should be abolished.

Premier Dalton McGuinty has been quoted many times today by the Liberal members. He is also on record on March 3, 2006, when he said, "My preference would be that we abolish the Senate.

We have former Conservative Senator Solange Chaput-Rolland who said, "The public does not trust the Senate. If you put a mic under people's nose, 85% would tell you to abolish the Senate".

● (1710)

If we are going to have representation by region or representation of the rights of minorities, then let us go back to the original founding principle of the Senate. John A. Macdonald said very clearly that the reason we are having a Senate is to protect the rights of minorities.

However, he was not talking about the kind of minority rights that we see protected in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. John A. Macdonald said there will always be more poor people than rich people, so we need a Senate; meaning that we need a Senate to follow on the old British system of peerage and one dealing with squires to ensure that the better class of people keep watch over us commoners who are elected by the common people. He said that there should be a chamber based on who one knows and a chamber that is exempt from any kind of scrutiny by the common people. That is why the original Senate was put in.

Government Orders

But, of course, if we took the Liberal argument at face value, that senators are actually there representing the regions, it would be predicated on a principle that they actually show up. For example, we know that they have a sitting schedule of a couple of days. They can miss 21 days without penalty.

Let us see. We had a senator who missed 71% of the sittings. B.C. Conservative Senator Pat Carney missed 65% of the sittings. Alberta Progressive Conservative Senator Elaine McCoy missed 57% of the sittings. Ontario Liberal Senator Vivienne Poy missed 53% of the sittings. How can they do this without any real penalty?

I would point out, when we in the House of Commons are trying to get the nation's business done, we have to rely on the Senate to actually get around to it.

At the end of the spring session in 2005, when the issue of the same sex marriage bill was being dealt with, which took so much time in this House and so much emotional energy, and finally got to the Senate, Senator Joyal was concerned that the debate on this bill would interrupt a free lunch that senators receive at the expense of the taxpayers. This is what he said and it is on the record:

Honourable senators, I am in a conundrum because I have spoken for more than 45 minutes. I know that food is being served in the library; I do not want to keep anyone here. There are other senators who might want to speak. Maybe I should limit the questioning; otherwise, it might go on for a long time. I trust the honourable senator will not be offended by that.

They were putting on the record that they would rather go for the free lunch at taxpayers' expense than do the business of the Canadian public.

I am not even going to get into the fact that they were just recently down at a casino in New Mexico while most average Canadians were having to hustle off to work in minus 50° temperatures, but of course our good senators found a place to have pina colodas and a little bit of suntan lotion on their backs while they were doing some very important business of the nation.

No doubt, it is such great business that they get to decide what the business is and where they are going to go. Boy, would it not be good to do important business of the nation at a casino in New Mexico just when it is minus 50°?

We do need democratic reform. We do need to move us into the 21st century. But, unfortunately, the process that is being put forward by our colleagues in the Conservative Party is not going to address the issues.

What we have seen here is an ad hoc bill that has been brought forward that is going to open all kinds of questions about how we choose and apportion seats based on region and population across this country.

Certainly, we need to increase the number of voices in the House of commons, but to do that is much more than simply bringing forward a bill with an arbitrary number of seats thrown around. We need to ensure that we have a proper process in place that actually involves, for example, consultations with the various regions. That has to be done.

The model that is put before us right now would seriously raise questions, for example, with the traditional floor of 25% being

guaranteed for Quebec. That will be thrown out of whack. There is no way to address that in this bill.

Before anyone thinks that this is an issue of pitting one region against another on these seats, it is interesting to note that Premier McGuinty, Premier Charest and Premier Doer from Manitoba have all made statements and have said they recognize the need to work together for a common solution on this. That kind of willingness to talk seemed to be absent from our government when it came up with this bill in the first place.

● (1715)

I have heard the issue that some areas will be overrepresented. I have heard the issue that in terms of democratic reform, if we have a system by population, it has to be fair. I certainly believe that.

If we look at how seats are apportioned already in Canada, there are vast discrepancies. We have ridings with populations as small as 29,000 people, 34,000 people, and rural regions where the base has been set at 68,000 per riding. Are we suggesting that we are going to a one size fits all? We will certainly see many seats begin to disappear.

Less should be said for some urban members who think that representing a region with 29,000 or 30,000 people is probably easy. I would like to see how big that riding is before I would jump in on that argument.

For myself, I represent a region in Ontario, and Ontario seems to have been the big discussion point today. My riding is the size of Great Britain. It is cheaper for someone to fly from Ottawa to Portugal and back than it is for one of my constituents to fly from Peawanuck to my office in Timmins. That is the vast size of the regions we are representing.

Under the last seat distribution more seats were taken out of northern Ontario because of the imbalance in population between southern Ontario, which is densely urban now. We have ridings that for some members are pretty much untenable. They simply cannot get to all the communities they have to represent because there are so many fly-in communities and so many isolated communities.

The issue of democracy is based on having access to our elected representatives. We have to have a balance. We also have to recognize that in Canada, our regions were not all set out with the same amount of population, so we have to have some form of balance.

The issue of fairness to Ontario, for any of the Ontario caucus, is a serious issue. We want to ensure that the regions of Ontario that are growing and that have needs are being represented. We also accept the fact that in the west there has been incredible population growth and that needs to be reflected in the long term.

However, we also recognize that this is a serious issue in terms of how we will actually bring all the different functions together because Canada is a very complex jigsaw puzzle.

What needs to be done? We certainly need to move forward with democratic reform. I have said from the beginning on this bill that we need to be careful. Let us not pit one region against another.

Government Orders

My hon. friend from the Liberal Party, from the Maritimes, was giving us the Niemoller defence of why he as a maritimer was standing up for Ontario because first the Conservatives would come after Ontario, then they would come after the Maritimes. I think that is dangerous talk.

I also think it is dangerous talk to simply assume that the government can come in, arbitrarily set the number of seats, and not have to deal with the fact that the province of Quebec has traditionally had 25%. That has been an understanding since Confederation. We need to make sure that if we are to be looking at this, that it be taken into consideration.

The balance in Quebec is the same as the balance that we have had in other regions of this country, where from the beginning, areas have been told they will get a certain amount of representation.

We need to deal with the issue of more divergent voices in the House, voices from across Canada, but we need to do that in a collaborative fashion, not in terms of a government bill that comes in and says, "We are setting this. This is how it will be", and then asks us, "Are you telling us that you will vote against the interests of Ontario? Are you telling us that you will vote against the interests of Alberta or British Columbia?"

The people in Ontario are looking to make sure that we have a democratic system that works, that is functional, and that represents the various issues.

• (1720)

I do not say that this is an easy situation. We have arrived at a very complex formula to maintain the checks and balances. That is why I would prefer we go back to the original issue of democratic reform, something the former NDP leader, Ed Broadbent, pushed for many years. This would bring us in line with 21st century democracies in other countries, which is the system of proportional representation, so we are not only hearing from various regions of the country, but ensuring a wider variety of voices in the House of Commons, and people feel there is a reason to vote.

We can look at the dwindling numbers year after year of voters, people who are turned off by the main political parties. They feel the House of Commons is often, on any given day of the week, a little more than a monkey house. We have to find a way to reach the 50% of voters who choose to stay home on election day. Some areas are lower, some areas are higher, but it leads to a question of a legitimacy crisis. When more and more Canadians are choosing not to participate in the voting system, we have to ask ourselves this. What we are doing wrong and how we are going to ensure those voters participate?

To throw an arbitrary number of 10 or 20 seats for Ontario or 7 or 5 for Alberta and British Columbia should not be the approach. We need to look at the long term vision of moving toward a discussion with all Canadians on getting proportional representation in place, leaving it up to the Canadian public to decide if that is what people want to do. We need to make people feel like they can reinvigorate this old institution, that they can have a voice to make a difference.

The other element of that, which is very important, is the need to deal with the Senate. We simply cannot go on year after year saying that we do not need to look at the Senate, that there will always be

other things at which we need to look. The fact is the Senate is unreformable.

Our friends in the Conservative Party believe in the triple E Senate while the NDP believes in the four U's, that senators are unelected, unaccountable, unreformable and certainly unnecessary in the 21st century. Nowhere else could we see a better example of that than the Senate code of ethics.

The Senate is under pressure because of the fact that the House of Commons is reforming itself. We were looking to help reform our recalcitrant brothers and sisters in the Senate, but, they were saying that they were in the upper House and they were going to choose how to set up their own standard of ethics.

These people sit on the boards of directors of major corporations. Many of them could have financial interests and take part in discussions and decisions in terms of federal law. Under the Senate code of ethics, senators can sit in, participate in and vote on debates where they would have financial interests. They are allowed to keep secret bank accounts. They are not compelled to disclose in any way any of the financial interests that direct family members have.

The other thing, which I find an outrageous sense of entitlement, is during in camera sessions, they can be involved in influencing decisions even if they have a pecuniary interest as long as they tell the other senators. However, they will rely on their fellow cronies not to make it public. It does not have to be made public that senators have a financial interest in something on which they are speaking. They wrote this code of ethics for themselves. They need a lot of help in being dragged kicking and screaming into the 21st century.

When I was a rural school board, it had a code of ethics standard that was 10 times higher than what the Senate wrote for itself. Anybody who has ever been on a municipal council, whether in a city or a rural municipality, knows it has a code of ethics that is higher than the Senate.

Just because the upper chamber is based on a system of privilege and unaccountability, why is it allowed to write itself a code of ethics that is this egregious? Senators are in the position to make decisions that can directly affect average Canadians. At the same time, they can sit on boards of corporations. Income trusts, telecommunications corporations, oil and gas and private health concerns are all areas that are brought forward continually for legislation. Senators can participate in those debates and vote.

In conclusion, the NDP believes Bill C-22 is a flawed attempt to bring democratic reform. Let us move forward with real democratic reform. Let us create a plan to engage the Canadian public in proportional representation and do the right thing.

Government Orders

●(1725)

Let us do the right thing. Let us abolish the Senate. It is a great room. There are beautiful paintings in there. I think it would make a wonderful public basketball court, but an open committee of Canadians could come up with many uses for it. We could certainly use the tax dollars wasted by senators on their trips, their privileges and their private buses. It would help to give us more support here the House of Commons, more committees and, at the end of day, more seats.

* * *

CANADA LABOUR CODE

(Bill C-40. On the Order: Government Orders:)

February 4, 2008—Second reading and reference to the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities of Bill C-40, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code, the Canada Student Financial Assistance Act, the Canada Student Loans Act and the Public Service Employment Act—The Minister of Labour.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties and I believe if you seek it, you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding any order or usual practices of this House Bill C-40, an act to amend the Canada Labour Code, the Canada Student Financial Assistance Act, the Canada Student Loans Act and the Public Service Employment Act shall be deemed to have been read a second time and referred to a committee of the whole, deemed considered in committee of the whole, deemed reported without amendment, deemed concurred in at the report stage and deemed read a third time and passed.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. government House leader have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time, considered in committee of the whole, reported without amendment, concurred in, read the third time and passed)

* * *

CONSTITUTION ACT, 2007 (DEMOCRATIC REPRESENTATION)

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-22, An Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867 (Democratic representation), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to my friend from the NDP, the member for Timmins—James Bay. He added some very interesting points to the discussion, although he was all over the map on a range of other issues, which were interesting but maybe not relevant to the debate.

Since we are debating a bill to amend the Constitution Act that goes back to 1867, he quite correctly pointed out that many small ridings with a small number of people are being represented by one member, perhaps in Yukon or in Northwest Territories, 30,000. Maybe there are 30,000 in Prince Edward Island. It is very different.

We have had to juggle between areas that are vastly distributed with small populations, in an attempt to bring balance over the years. For some of the members who have entered the debate tonight and who have ignored what has happened historically, it has never been exclusively representation by population. We have always had to balance the disparities and regions by population.

There have been three guiding principles: first, no province would have less MPs than senators, and our friends from Prince Edward Island like to remind us they were good negotiators; second, no area would lose seats; and third, representation by population should be attempted.

The bill attempts to do exactly that. No region would lose seats. It is consistent with the history of conciliation, recognizing other areas that have needs. It will provide a representation for those provinces that have vastly outgrown other areas because of the tremendous growth in recent history.

Provinces like Ontario, which would receive more MPs, have a better ratio of representation by population and it will have a higher representation in the House than it has now.

Would the member not recognize that the bill, as put forward, is very consistent with the way members throughout history have tried to balance and juggle these things and therefore change his position and support the bill?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, we have always supported the need for a balancing act. We are concerned that this is not the way to go about it. We need to have at least a public committee. We need to deal with the provinces. We need to ensure actual fairness. What we have been given are three arbitrary numbers put together by the government.

It does not address concerns that have been raised in Ontario, and those are legitimate. Going around and attacking the Premier of Ontario, which the government has done, is not a respectful way to engage in consultation.

Mr. McGuinty has put forth the position that he is very concerned about how this will impact Ontario. We know Premier Jean Charest in Quebec has raised concerns about how this will be addressed. The government has not looked at the fundamental issue of the seats in Quebec either. However, Premier Gary Doer of Manitoba, Premier McGuinty and Premier Charest have all spoken about the fact that even though they have various views and issues in how they want to have representation, they are of the mind of working together on this.

We need to go forward with that spirit. Unfortunately, and I do not fault the government for trying, at the end of the day the bill is a half measure. It has not dealt with the need for consultation. Since we are going to be dealing with many contentious issues, let us start addressing the need for real democratic reform in the House.

Government Orders

● (1730)

[*Translation*]

SENATE APPOINTMENT CONSULTATIONS ACT

The House resumed from February 12 consideration of the motion.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:30 p.m., The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred division on the motion to refer Bill C-20 to a committee before second reading.

Call in the members.

● (1755)

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

(*Division No. 41*)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Albrecht	Alghabra
Allen	Allison
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	Angus
Arthur	Atamanenko
Bagnell	Baird
Barnes	Batters
Beaumier	Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Bell (North Vancouver)	Bennett
Benoit	Bevilacqua
Bevington	Bezan
Black	Blackburn
Blaney	Bonin
Boshcoff	Boucher
Breitkreuz	Brison
Brown (Oakville)	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooge
Byrne	Calkins
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)	Cannis
Cannon (Pontiac)	Carrie
Casson	Chan
Charlton	Chong
Chow	Christopherson
Clement	Coderre
Comartin	Comuzzi
Cotler	Crowder
Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)	Cullen (Etobicoke North)
Cummins	Cuzner
D'Amours	Davidson
Davies	Day
Del Mastro	Devolin
Dewar	Dhaliwal
Dhalla	Dion
Doyle	Dryden
Dykstra	Easter
Emerson	Epp
Eyking	Fast
Finley	Fitzpatrick
Flaherty	Fletcher
Fry	Galipeau
Gallant	Godfrey
Godin	Goldring
Goodyear	Gourde
Grewal	Guarnieri
Guergis	Harper
Harris	Harvey
Hawn	Hearn
Hiebert	Hill
Hinton	Holland
Hubbard	Ignatieff
Jaffer	Jean
Jennings	Julian
Kadis	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Karetak-Lindell	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Keeper	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)

Khan	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lauzon	Layton
Lebel	LeBlanc
Lee	Lemieux
Lukiwski	Lunney
MacAulay	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	Malhi
Maloney	Manning
Mark	Marleau
Marston	Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Masse	Mathysen
Matthews	Mayes
McCallum	McDonough
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	Menzies
Merrifield	Miller
Mills	Minna
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	
Mulcair	Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Murphy (Charlottetown)	Nash
Neville	Nicholson
Norlock	O'Connor
Obhrai	Oda
Pacetti	Patry
Pearson	Petit
Poillievre	Prentice
Preston	Proulx
Rajotte	Ratansi
Redman	Regan
Reid	Richardson
Ritz	Rodriguez
Rota	Savage
Savoie	Scarpaleggia
Scheer	Schellenberger
Scott	Sgro
Shiple	Siksay
Silva	Simard
Skelton	Smith
Solberg	Sorenson
St. Amand	Stanton
Steckle	Storseth
Strahl	Sweet
Szabo	Telegdi
Temelkovski	Thibault (West Nova)
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)	Thompson (Wild Rose)
Tilson	Toews
Tonks	Trost
Turner	Tweed
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vellacott	Verner
Wallace	Warawa
Warkentin	Wasylycia-Leis
Watson	Wilfert
Williams	Wrzesnewskyj
Yelich	Zed- — 224

NAYS

Members

Asselin
Barbot
Bigras
Bonsant
Bourgeois
Cardin
Crête
Demers
Duceppe
Freeman
Gaudet
Guay
Kotto
Laframboise
Lemay
Lévesque
Malo
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
Nadeau
Paquette
Plamondon
St-Cyr

St-Hilaire
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)
Vincent — 48

PAIRED

Nil

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to a legislative committee.

(Motion agreed to and bill referred to a committee)

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

NATIONAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ACT

The House resumed from February 11 consideration of the motion that Bill C-474, An Act to require the development and implementation of a National Sustainable Development Strategy, the reporting of progress against a standard set of environmental indicators and the appointment of an independent Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development accountable to Parliament, and to adopt specific goals with respect to sustainable development in Canada, and to make consequential amendments to another Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Deputy Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at second reading stage of Bill C-474, under private members' business.

• (1805)

[Translation]

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

(Division No. 42)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Albrecht	Alghabra
Allen	Allison
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	André
Angus	Arthur
Asselin	Atamanenko
Bachand	Bagnell
Baird	Barbot
Barnes	Batters
Beaumier	Bell (Vancouver Island North)
Bell (North Vancouver)	Bellavance
Bennett	Benoit
Bevilacqua	Bevington
Bezan	Bigras
Black	Blackburn
Blais	Blaney
Bonin	Bonsant
Boshcoff	Bouchard
Boucher	Bourgeois
Breitkreuz	Brisson
Brown (Oakville)	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooge
Brunelle	Byrne
Calkins	Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Cannis	Cannon (Pontiac)
Cardin	Carrie
Carrier	Casson
Chan	Charlton
Chong	Chow
Christopherson	Clement

Coderre
Comuzzi
Crête
Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)
Cummins
D'Amours
Davies
DeBellefeuille
Demers
Devolin
Dhaliwal
Doyle
Duceppe
Easter
Epp
Faille
Finley
Fletcher
Fry
Galipeau
Gaudet
Godin
Goodyear
Gravel
Guarnieri
Guergis
Harris
Hawn
Hiebert
Hinton
Hubbard
Jaffer
Jennings
Kadis
Karetak-Lindell
Keeper
Khan
Kotto
Laforest
Lake
Lavallée
Lebel
Lee
Lemieux
Lévesque
Lunney
MacAulay
MacKenzie
Malo
Manning
Marleau
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Mathysen
Mayes
McDonough
Ménard (Hochelaga)
Menzies
Miller
Minna
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Mulcair
Murphy (Charlottetown)
Nash
Nicholson
O'Connor
Oda
Pacetti
Patry
Petit
Plamondon
Prentice
Proulx
Ratansi
Regan
Richardson
Rodriguez
Roy
Savoie
Scheer
Scott
Shipley
Silva
Skelton

Private Members' Business

Comartin
Cotler
Crowder
Cullen (Etobicoke North)
Cuzner
Davidson
Day
Del Mastro
Deschamps
Dewar
Dhalla
Dryden
Dykstra
Emerson
Eyking
Fast
Fitzpatrick
Freeman
Gagnon
Gallant
Godfrey
Goldring
Gourde
Grewal
Guay
Guimond
Harvey
Hearn
Hill
Holland
Ignatieff
Jean
Julian
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Komarnicki
Kram (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Laframboise
Lauzon
Layton
LeBlanc
Lemay
Lessard
Lukiwski
Lussier
MacKay (Central Nova)
Malhi
Maloney
Mark
Marston
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Masse
Matthews
McCallum
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
Merrifield
Mills
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Mourani
Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Nadeau
Neville
Norlock
Obhrai
Ouellet
Paquette
Pearson
Picard
Poilievre
Preston
Rajotte
Redman
Reid
Ritz
Rota
Savage
Scarpaleggia
Schellenberger
Sgro
Siksay
Simard
Smith

Private Members' Business

Solberg	Sorenson
St-Cyr	St-Hilaire
St. Amand	Stanton
Steckle	Storseth
Strahl	Sweet
Szabo	Telegdi
Temelkovski	Thi Lac
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)	
Thibault (West Nova)	
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)	Thompson (Wild Rose)
Tilson	Toews
Tonks	Turner
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vellacott	Verner
Vincent	Wallace
Warawa	Warkentin
Wasylycia-Leis	Watson
Wilfert	Williams
Wrzesnewskyj	Yelich
Zed— 267	

NAYS

Members

Trost— 1

PAIRED

Nil

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development.

(Bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: It being 6:10 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

* * *

• (1810)

CANADIAN ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION ACT

The House resumed from January 28 consideration of the motion that Bill C-469, An Act to amend the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999 (use of phosphorus), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to continue on with my speech on Bill C-469, An Act to amend the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, a bill to essentially remove all dish and laundry detergents that contain phosphorus. I want to thank the hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé for this well-intentioned bill.

When I was last speaking to this issue, I was talking about Lake Winnipeg and how it is the pride and joy of Manitoba. I am so proud to have it as part of my constituency.

This government has shown its commitment to Lake Winnipeg. Last November the Minister of the Environment demonstrated the government's commitment by coming to Manitoba and announcing that Lake Winnipeg was going to get \$18 million of new money toward cleaning up Lake Winnipeg. I want to thank the Minister of the Environment for making that announcement and for standing up for the cleanup of Lake Winnipeg when it did not happen for 13 long years under the previous administration.

This fund which the minister announced is a dedicated stewardship fund for Lake Winnipeg. It provides funding to retain the experts and the tools that are needed to physically clean up the lake and remove all the excessive nutrients which helps with these algae blooms that occur and which create toxicity in the system.

The good news is that we will be able to restore the ecological integrity of Lake Winnipeg with this investment, but the lake will not clean itself up. It took a commitment by this federal government to start the process of cleaning up the lake. Luckily our party, a party that does care about Lake Winnipeg, was able to take action after all those years of neglect.

I have talked with many of my constituents about Lake Winnipeg. They have told me that not only is it important that we are cleaning up the lake, but also that future nutrient loading be reduced to ensure that the lake stays clean, and that there has to be a long term solution. My constituents and I have definitely taken a very serious interest in the introduction of this bill. It is a well-intentioned bill and I support the principles of it.

Dish and laundry detergents are only part of the problem in my riding though. They are not the sole cause of all the blue-green algae. While a bill such as this would help reduce the amount of phosphorus entering our waterways, there will still be other sources contributing to the problem. That is what the stewardship fund of \$18 million is going to also help to address.

It is important to also note that detergent manufacturers may view this measure as unfairly targeting just them, as there are many other sources of phosphorus, including natural sources, municipal sources and agricultural sources.

I must remind the hon. member who has sponsored this bill that we are fortunate to have a free market economy that allows consumers endless choices when it comes to the products they buy. When it comes to chemical based detergents, there are other products on the market that they could buy which do not contain phosphorus. I have always said that when we look at the problems in our watershed, and I have talked about Lake Winnipeg, every person in Manitoba, every person in Saskatchewan, Alberta and northwestern Ontario has only one person to blame, and that is the person who is looking at them in the mirror. We all have a responsibility to address this problem and reduce the amount of phosphorus that we are using in our households and in our yards.

We are all responsible for making the individual everyday choices that are going to be good for the environment and good for our waterways, so let us recognize those Canadians who are making a difference in their everyday lives. When it comes to collective urban waste, it is also helpful that municipal waste water treatment plants that are being developed are employing advanced techniques to remove phosphorus before discharging their waste.

Nevertheless, last September the government announced its intention to take action to cut water pollution by setting hard and tough new national standards for sewage treatment. Municipal waste water effluent is the single most significant contributor to water pollution, and this government is taking action. The government is assisting municipalities to meet these standards. The unprecedented \$33 billion building Canada initiative will provide assurance to Canadians that long term, stable and predictable funding will help support infrastructure projects such as sewage treatment systems.

It is important to note that advances in technology are allowing farmers to adopt nutrient management strategies. The environmental farm plans that have been developed at Agriculture Canada have really helped farmers determine how to use fertilizer, how to apply manure and how to protect any water that is actually draining off their own farmlands and barnyards, in order to prevent those products from getting into the waterway.

Fertilizing, for example, used to be guesswork, but today, new technology allows farmers to apply the exact amount of nitrogen and phosphorus that is needed on their land. That is important to make sure that everything that is being applied is being used by the crop and is not running off as excess fertilizer.

• (1815)

While the government cleans up Lake Winnipeg after years of neglect, we are excited about these new technologies that will prevent the nutrient loading in the future.

It is important for the government to support these advances in technology that allow Canadians to work toward their own phosphorus reduction. Measures such as these go a lot further in reducing nutrients in our environment.

Canadians can have confidence that their government will continue to work with its partners on its action plan for clean water to achieve real results and tangible improvements in Canada's water.

On behalf of my constituents, I would like to thank the hon. member for the introduction of this private member's bill and for initiating this important debate we are having here today. I look forward to supporting it when it comes to a vote.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak this evening to Bill C-469, which arose from two or three sessions the Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development held last spring—a committee of which I am a member. This bill is modelled on a private member's bill that I tabled shortly beforehand, Bill C-464, which shares the same objective as the Bloc bill.

My colleagues and I support Bill C-469 and we will vote to refer it to the Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development to be studied and amended. My own Bill C-464 is more detailed. I hope a few amendments will be made in the Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development to add more detail to Bill C-469.

[*English*]

There are some shortcomings with this bill. I would like to go over them briefly. It is normal for private members' bills not to be entirely

Private Members' Business

perfect, because of course private members do not have the same resources at their disposal as governments and ministers introducing legislation. It is very normal and understandable that bills might need some amendments and a bit more work in committee.

My own bill, Bill C-464, would technically eliminate phosphates from dishwashing detergent. In fact, it would reduce the phosphate level to 0.5% by weight. The main reason for this is that it makes virtually no sense to completely eliminate the phosphate levels in dishwashing detergent, because, number one, there are phosphates, I am told, in the packaging of detergents, which is what keeps the packaging firm. There will always be a trace amount of phosphates in any detergent.

When we get to committee, we will have to hear from industry representatives and technical experts from the Department of the Environment, but I am surmising that we might have to amend the bill to allow 0.5% by weight.

Also, it is quite possible we will have to amend the bill to allow some exceptions. For example, a minimal amount of phosphates may be required for detergents that are used at the institutional level, for instance, in hospitals, nursing homes and schools, where there are obviously some potential public health concerns that would have to be alleviated by having some level of phosphates in the detergent. No doubt we will get to that issue in committee.

By way of history, it is very interesting to note that laundry detergents have had very low levels of phosphates for many years, because the regulations under CEPA for laundry detergents were created within the context of the Canada-U.S. Great Lakes water quality agreement. These levels were regulated long before dishwashers became popular and essentially ubiquitous. At the time, the government was focused only on laundry detergent. That is why the CEPA regulations at the moment do not include regulations for phosphates in dishwashing detergent. That is a bit of an anomaly of history and is something to take note of.

The issue of phosphates in laundry detergent is really not a pressing issue at all. It is the dishwashing detergent that we have to focus on and that is why my bill focused specifically on that.

We have to ask ourselves why we need this Bloc bill or my bill in the first place. I will give credit to my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, who presented a motion to the environment committee to have discussions on the issue of phosphates. This was done many months ago and yet there has been no government action on this issue. This is why we need two private members' bills. Even if they are not perfect bills, we need private members' bills because the government has not acted on the issue, even though the issue of phosphates in dishwashing detergent made headlines all over Quebec almost a year ago.

Private Members' Business

Some people may say that the government is working on amending these regulations. There are two things wrong with that explanation. First, it does not take a lot to make a minor change to CEPA regulations to deal with phosphates. Second, three or four weeks ago when officials from Environment Canada appeared before the environment committee, I asked the question: why do we not have regulations in CEPA to deal with phosphates in dishwashing detergent?

Do members know what I was told? I do not blame the officials for this. In fact, the minister himself should have been present to answer the questions, but he could only stay an hour that day.

● (1820)

I was told that it was not a priority. They said that phosphates in dishwashing detergent is not a priority for them. That was two weeks ago. Then, of course, there was probably a bit of public pressure or some media attention given to the issue again and, lo and behold, we were told a couple of weeks later that the government will amend CEPA regulations.

This is endemic in the Conservative government. The government never acts on the obvious. It never recognizes the truth of the matter until public pressure is put on it. Then it reacts, but late. That is why we need two private members' bills: to put the government on notice that it should be doing the right thing.

Some people, especially on the government side, originally responded that phosphates in dishwashing detergent make up only 1.5% of the problem of phosphorus in water. Of course, there is the whole issue of agricultural fertilizers and runoff from agricultural lands that gets into the waterways, and of course that is a problem. There is also the problem of municipal sewage effluent, which leads to phosphorus in waterways.

So why devote energy to removing phosphates from dishwashing detergent when this is not a huge part of the problem? In politics, there are issues that are catalysts. They may sound simple and be simple, but they somehow allow us to open the door to a broad range of other related issues.

When it comes to climate change, we might focus on something like home renovations to make someone's home more energy efficient. The problem is much more complex than that, I agree, but when we talk about something that is concrete and understandable, we generate public debate. It creates the impetus or the political will to deal with the larger problem, which is a lot more complicated.

It is the same with the phosphate issue. It is a small part of the problem, but it gets discussion going about the quality of our water and also about the need for a national water strategy, which we still do not have. After it was mentioned in passing in the last budget and given lip service in the throne speech, we still do not have a national water strategy. Maybe we need to be talking about dishwashing detergent, because even though it is a small problem, it is something people can relate to and understand.

While the problem of dishwashing detergent is minor in some parts of the country, it is in fact major in Quebec, especially in lakes in the Laurentians, where much of the phosphorus is from cottagers using dishwashers.

● (1825)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this evening I have the pleasure of being here with you and my colleagues to discuss this bill.

This represents another attempt by this Parliament to change the government's attitude and to have it protect the environment.

For the current government, which we hope will not be in power much longer, the environment is not important and protecting it is not an urgent matter.

We have a completely different view of the situation and we believe we have to do something about it right now. Canadians believe that the environment is currently the most important issue.

[*English*]

Phosphorus is an obvious problem that is just coming to light with recent blooms and because of serious issues, particularly in Quebec and Ontario, but it is not restricted to those particular provinces. There have been other places and other bodies of water where it has caused huge concern. Getting down to the source is what this bill attempts to do.

We had some witness testimony about what these influxes of phosphorus can actually lead to. They start with seemingly harmless sources in dishwasher detergent, laundries and farming fertilizers and end up in our waters, but then, through accumulation, they allow these allow algae blooms to go on. Cyanobacteria are created in these blooms and these can be very harmful to human health.

I will quote Richard Carignan, of the Université de Montréal, who talked about the serious nature of the effects on human health and the ecosystem. Cyanobacteria create:

—toxins that cause skin irritation and symptoms that are like gastroenteritis. Also, they may affect the nervous system. Because of that, health departments are aware of cyanobacteria. In Quebec at least, when they observe toxins in the water, they generally close the body of water to most uses.

That has impacts not just on the environment but on the economy and the quality of life of those who are near that body of water and those impacts can be profound.

[*Translation*]

There are many solutions to this problem. The government does not have a sense of urgency with regard to putting in place the solutions needed—solutions that citizens want now. The problem has been around for many years. It is nothing new. In last summer's news it may have seemed new but this problem has been around for many years.

We have to figure exactly what the problem is. To focus simply on detergents is not enough, we need to find out what can be done. We have to determine how to manage the land while respecting agriculture and the farmers who live on the land.

I recall that this summer the candidate for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, the current member for Outremont and I announced a comprehensive plan, together with some very important Quebec producers.

This bill is one option and a good start. However, we must address other matters and other aspects of the problem. It is important to do so to find a solution.

As for the NDP plan, the existing buffer zone of three metres—or something like that—is not enough. The need is greater and, in certain cases, three metres are not enough. Our plan proposes a 10-metre buffer. Quebec farmers have expressed considerable enthusiasm about this plan. Thus, it is important for the NDP. The cost of this plan is \$50 million for the entire country.

We think it is a good solution. The farming community is making a concerted effort to move this forward, but it is difficult. It is very difficult. Quite frankly, almost all Canadian farmers need help. They need help from this government and all governments in the country.

I would like to read another quotation regarding the issue of chemicals, a very important issue. The same professor from the Université de Montréal also said:

The most recent federal analyses of acid rain progression in Canada indicate that much of the blue green algae that has been flourishing in Quebec over the past three years, including in the Laurentians where there is very little agriculture, is falling, for the most part, literally from the sky.

● (1830)

[English]

There is mounting evidence and interest of Canadians from coast to coast on this issue. It is important to realize that we cannot proceed without a federal action plan. The government seems loathe to even consider that as was the case when dealing with our waters.

I can recall this from the very first throne speech. The government talked about having a national water inventory and a national water strategy, an announcement that we hesitantly encouraged and were excited about. I say with some hesitance because the government's promises and commitments and what actually happens is so often misleading.

What happened in this particular instance, and we are now two years away from that time when the government announced its plans, was that we still do not have a national water strategy nor a national inventory.

The reason that this is important for this particular private member's bill is it would deal with not just instances that come up when there is news attention, when the crisis comes, but also to allow Canadians some feeling of certainty that the government has in hand their best interests and a plan that will allow us to go ahead.

Yet, we are still waiting. There is a huge discrepancy, as my dear colleague from Winnipeg pointed out to me earlier, that across the country, when we look at federal and provincial spending patterns, in particular federal in this case, there are enormous discrepancies between bodies of water.

I will take just two for example. There is the very small Lake Simcoe, which has a great deal of real estate interest and tourism interest. It receives almost \$16,500 per square kilometre of water in federal funding. Whereas Lake Winnipeg, which I know is near and dear to your heart, Mr. Speaker, receives just \$250 per square kilometre.

Private Members' Business

In this instance, between almost \$17,000 and \$250, we see the results on the water and in the water quality. That level of stress that is brought to those who depend and survive alongside these bodies of water is justified.

Lake Winnipeg has a \$55 million freshwater fishery with obviously enormous economic impacts, probably the largest freshwater fishery in the continent. Yet, the government is without a national strategy and without any kind of national vision. How to deal with water is something that is obviously near and dear to the hearts of many Canadians.

In the absence of that plan, it is a hodge-podge of band-aid solutions trying to make some attempt at actually dealing with the urgency of this serious issue.

A government that actually took this issue seriously, that actually believed that water was at some risk, would bring forward a national strategy to deal with it, at least aquifer inventory, at least an understanding of where the water is, what water is at threat, and what is at risk.

Yet instead, we have a government which even on issues like climate change, when it does conduct the studies which the government has through natural resources, completes the study as to the impacts of climate change on our economies and our communities, and then sits on the study for four months and still has not released it to the Canadian public.

These were taxpayer dollars that the government spent to create this study, to allow us to understand the impacts of our policy choices and our industrial choices, and it refuses to allow this study out into the public realm.

We think this has to stop. If the truth is what the government is afraid of, then clearly its policies are not aligned with a future that Canadians are looking for.

If its policies are aligned and the government is comfortable with the truth, then it should start to release these studies, begin to create a national water strategy that will allow Canadians to deal with phosphorous concentrations in their water and the impacts of climate change.

Canadians will only then feel like the government is actually willing and ready to put ideology aside and put in its place clear thinking based upon science that will allow Canadians to feel that assurance that the peace, order and good governance written into our Constitution is actually being enacted on behalf of the Canadian people by their government.

At this point it is difficult to call this particular representation the Government of Canada because its interests obviously lie not with the interests of Canadians.

● (1835)

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to join the debate today on Bill C-469, which seeks to prohibit the use or sale in Canada and the import of dishwasher detergents and laundry detergents that contain phosphorus.

Private Members' Business

First, I want to congratulate my colleague from Berthier—Maskinongé, who introduced this bill and who is nothing less than the driving force behind the decisions made by the Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development. Since June 12, 2007, the committee has called on the federal government to act quickly to amend the Canadian Environmental Protection Act to forbid the sale or importation of products containing phosphates. The member for Berthier—Maskinongé is rendering a service to the residents of his riding who are affected by the problem of cyanobacteria, but the Conservative government does not appear to be aware of this. He is also rendering a great service to all regions of Canada affected by this problem.

Earlier, my NDP colleague spoke of Lake Winnipeg, which is affected by this problem. It is rare that a provincial minister testifies before a parliamentary standing committee. However, the Manitoba Environment Minister came before the standing committee to say that Manitoba supports the Bloc Québécois motion calling for the prohibition of phosphates. I am firmly convinced that she is very happy to see the Bloc Québécois member introducing this bill today. We hope it will receive the support of a majority in Parliament.

This problem is not new but it has grown tremendously in recent years. I will cite three years as references. The first year is 2005. At that time, cyanobacteria were found in 50 lakes in Quebec. The following year, that number doubled. There were 107 lakes affected by cyanobacteria; and two years later, the problem had spread to more than 200 lakes in Quebec. That means that within two years, there was a four-fold increase in the number of lakes affected. We may well imagine that in 2008 the problem is not getting smaller; on the contrary, it is growing. Regions all over Quebec are affected.

I see the Conservatives representing their electors today in the House of Commons. The hon. member for Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean says he is representing the people of his riding. However, last year we saw alerts in the Pointe-Taillon national park in Lac-Saint-Jean. People were asked to be careful because the lake, lac Saint-Jean, in the Pointe-Taillon area in particular, was affected by the cyanobacteria phenomenon. Today we see the Conservatives voting in parliamentary committee, and in the House of Commons I am sure, against a motion, against the bill introduced by my colleague from Berthier—Maskinongé, when these people need to be defended. That member is not defending the interests of his riding.

We must be vigilant because the phenomenon will spread in the coming weeks. It is not for nothing that the Government of Quebec is organizing an information session on February 28 to alert people and organizations to the fact that this phenomenon will get worse this spring.

My Liberal colleague was right. In the 1970s, the government used the Canadian Environmental Protection Act to regulate laundry products containing phosphates. Those products were not banned, as the Bloc Québécois would like, but limited to containing a minimal amount of phosphates.

• (1840)

Why was that decision made in the 1970s? That decision was made because many homes and cottages had washing machines and people were using products containing phosphates.

In the 1970s, dishwashers were not that common in cottages. An increasing number of baby boomers have acquired second homes that were considered cottages at the time. Those homes are increasingly becoming primary residences. Baby boomers are increasingly living in cottages, which they are converting from summer homes to primary residences equipped with dishwashers that use phosphates and make the cyanobacteria problem even worse. We have to do something about this.

There are some good corporate citizens out there. For example, just two weeks ago the Jean Coutu pharmacies decided to ban the sale of products containing phosphates.

In the meantime, other companies are selling products that contain phosphates, at the expense of public health, environmental protection and property values. When you own a property or purchase a residence on the shoreline of a lake that has been struck by cyanobacteria, clearly that limits your ability to go swimming or do other water sports. All in all, it has a direct impact on the value of properties that people bought some years ago.

The issues addressed by the bill my colleague has introduced are not environmental only. It also addresses health, social and economic issues. Are we the only ones who are considering this kind of measure? The answer is no. Switzerland and Washington state have already adopted regulations of this kind, banning the sale of products containing phosphates. The Bloc Québécois is not alone in considering this kind of measure. Progressive states and countries have already introduced regulations like this, which are now the law of the land. As well, as of early 2008, the European Union will be adopting the same kind of regulations, to ban both laundry detergent and dishwashing detergent containing phosphates.

This bill is a logical next step from the intention that a majority of members of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development expressed on June 12, calling for a ban on the sale and importation of these kinds of products.

Earlier, the Liberal member said the Liberals would be proposing amendments. All of a sudden the Liberal Party seems to want to backtrack from the position it stated in committee. I invite the Liberal Party to vote for this bill in principle. I also invite the NDP to support this bill in principle and be realistic when it comes to the amendments they want to make. I have seen the plan presented by the NDP; I have seen that it is proposing to expand buffer strips around lakes from 3 to 10 metres. We must be aware, however, that there are regulations in place in Quebec. Federal legislation must not interfere directly in matters within the jurisdiction of the provinces. We must be careful in that regard. What the NDP says is that the regulations have to be changed. Perhaps, but personally, I have always understood that land planning issues are matters that come within the exclusive jurisdiction of the provinces.

• (1845)

Is the NDP trying to tell us today that it wants to interfere? I think that the consensus today and in the days to come should be that we vote for the bill and for the principle behind my colleague's bill. We can thus echo the motion from the standing committee and respond to the request by the government of Quebec, which wants to legislate, but wants to see the measure that was introduced on December 5 expanded.

[English]

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, I have a general reminder. I realize tomorrow is a great day. It is Valentine's Day. Maybe those tuned in watching tonight may not have realized the day has crept up on us rather quickly. There is still time to get out and perhaps get something for their loved ones, an emblem of their admiration for their partners. I hope they can do that.

First, I thank the member for Berthier—Maskinongé. He was the first member in the House who I asked a question of when I spoke in the chamber in April 2006. Therefore, the member certainly brings back good memories of my experience in the House.

Today, it is my pleasure to inform the House of a number of initiatives that our government is undertaking to protect our rivers and lakes and to advise of the recent undertakings concerning the regulation of phosphorus in detergents.

We are all well aware of the concerns around phosphate contamination in surface water and we must realize that Canada's waterways are icons for our country. Our rivers and lakes are synonymous with our history and our heritage. They are vital to our economy. The government recognizes that they are also critical to our and our environment. This is why a suite of actions has been taken by the government to protect the quality and vitality of Canada's waterways.

Phosphorus is commonly used in detergents to soften water, to reduce spotting and rusting and to suspend particulate in the wash water. However, it can also act as a nutrient and, as such, can be a factor contributing to the growth of blue-green algae in our lakes. We can all well recall, last summer in particular, that certain regions of the country experienced those blue-green algae blooms. Those blooms can dominate their aquatic environment and impact on the ability of Canadians to enjoy recreational waterways.

I underline, however, that the sources of phosphorus are numerous. They can come from the land and from waste water, as well as from detergents.

According to Environment Canada's report entitled "Nutrients and Their Impact on the Canadian Environment", I can inform the House that on the annual phosphorus discharges of approximately 68,000 tonnes, agriculture accounted for 82%, while municipal waste water discharge was 8%, including only 1% for all detergents and cleaners.

With many sources, there is no single or simple solution. As a result, phosphorus and other pollutants to Canada's waterways are being tackled on a multiple of fronts.

Private Members' Business

I point out that Environment Canada scientists are collaborating with their colleagues at Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada in creating a national agri-environmental standards. When developed, these standards will help to protect the freshwater ecosystems from the negative effects of excessive amounts of phosphorus and other pollutants from agricultural activity.

Likewise, the government is also taking action on other significant sources of phosphates with the proposed regulations on sewage treatment announced by the Minister of the Environment in September 2007. This action will set new standards for 4,600 waste water systems in Canada. We are committed to action to reduce pollutants in waste water.

The government recognizes that these new regulations will imply costs. To offset this burden, the government has set aside \$8.1 billion to assist provinces and municipalities to upgrade infrastructure, such as sewage treatment facilities. In addition, the 2007 Speech from the Throne included the government's commitment to help clean up major lakes and oceans.

Just last August, the government renewed the Canada-Ontario agreement to clean up 15 areas of concern in the great lakes. There is also the first nations water management strategy.

These are all examples of the government taking action to contribute to a healthier environment and improve water quality through a wide-range suite of initiatives.

• (1850)

We do not do this alone. We are committed to working with and alongside our provincial and territorial colleagues to meet the challenges we face. There are few resources so fundamentally important to our well-being than water. Through the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment, new guidelines for Canadian drinking water quality are being developed.

Today, however, we are talking specifically about banning phosphorous. Phosphorous in detergent is already the subject of regulation. Back in the seventies, phosphorous concentrations in laundry detergents were first regulated after blue and green algae became a problem in the Great Lakes system.

In the seventies, waste water treatment was not what it is today. At that time, dishwashers were not a standard item in most households. In the seventies, laundry detergent was the significant contributor. However, with the intervening years, it is understandable and timely that we revisit phosphorous and its impact on our environment and human health.

The current regulation, to which I just referred, sets the maximum phosphorous limit in laundry detergent to 2.2% by weight. I can give the assurance that good regulation, the kind done by the government, is a considered and consultative process. Good regulation takes technical, economic and social realities into account. With hurried and unrealistic timelines, we risk forcing the industry to introduce other chemical substitutes before it is satisfied of their safety and effectiveness.

Private Members' Business

Good regulation, the kind the government supports, considers health and the safety of Canadians. A wholesale ban on phosphorous may not be appropriate. For example, detergents used for dishwashers in hospitals call for a different formulation of detergent than we might use in our homes. This is because the machines in hospitals use greater heat, do larger loads and have faster cycles than those of household machines.

Phosphorous currently plays an important role in these specialized detergent uses. This role might be ignored in precipitous decisions, but good regulation will give this due consideration.

In addition to acting to protect the environment and the health of Canadians, good regulation respects trade obligations. As can be appreciated, we have a number of these under NAFTA and the WTO. At present, five American states have moved to limit both laundry and dishwasher detergents to phosphorous concentrations of no more than 0.5%. Other states are also moving in this direction.

Our regulations will serve to protect the environment while at the same time respect our trade obligations.

At home, the provinces of Quebec and Manitoba have proposed provincial controls for phosphorous concentrations in dishwasher detergents. The government will also consult with our colleagues in the provinces and territories so as to support environmental protection across Canada as well as domestic trade.

I note that the European Union has regulations on phosphorous in laundry detergent, but has not yet tackled dishwasher detergent. In this I am pleased to say that Canada is in the vanguard along with several American states.

Our proposed regulations for sewage treatment, for funding of treatment facilities, for collaboration with agriculture and for the many other initiatives the government is doing demonstrate our concrete actions to preserve and protect the quality of our water in Canada.

• (1855)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is my great pleasure to rise today to wrap up the debate on Bill C-469 to amend the Canadian Environmental Protection Act to prohibit the manufacturing, sale or importation of laundry and dish detergents that contain phosphates.

To close the debate, I would like to thank all members of Parliament who spoke in favour of this bill and who are particularly concerned about the environment. I listened to my Conservative colleague. I agree with some of the things he said, but not with others. If he is at all concerned about the environment, I think that the least he should do is vote for this bill so that it can be referred to the committee for further study. This bill deserves that much.

I call on all parliamentarians, including the member for Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean. We know that Lac-Saint-Jean, for example, has been affected by the blue-green algae problem. We hope that the member will take that into account when it is time to vote, as well as the concerns of environmentalists in the Lac-Saint-Jean region, of course.

As I said when debate commenced on second reading, this bill was tabled because last summer we all saw the problem with phosphates throughout Quebec and all over Canada. We know that detergent products containing phosphates help spread cyanobacteria. We have talked about this. Everyone here in Parliament has heard about the problem with cyanobacteria.

Aside from the measures each of us must take as individuals, the federal government must also take concrete action to solve this problem, following in the steps of the Government of Quebec, which has implemented an action plan for fighting cyanobacteria. Since Ottawa is responsible for regulating imported products, we are—as is the Quebec National Assembly—calling on the federal government to take action through this bill and ban phosphates in detergents.

I have read and listened carefully to members' comments. Of course, we will look at some of the recommendations in committee. That is why it is important for this bill to be referred to committee, so it can be studied by the committee, as I already mentioned. As I was discussing with my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, people deserve to have their say and for this to be studied.

It is important that we take action to preserve our lakes, and that we keep our water clean. We must also work on environmental issues and on all the issues currently affecting our planet. This bill is a start. It does not completely resolve the cyanobacteria problem. That much we know. We also know that there are other problems related to cyanobacteria, but let us start by at least partially resolving it. That is important.

This is why I am asking all parliamentarians today to move forward and vote in favour of this bill, which would partially resolve the issue of blue-green algae and cyanobacteria throughout Quebec and the rest of Canada. I urge anyone who is concerned about the environment and all the issues affecting our planet's future to vote in favour of this bill.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Accordingly the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

• (1900)

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, I think if you were to seek it you would get unanimous consent to see the clock as 7:10 p.m.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

EMERGENCY DEBATE

[*Translation*]

LIVESTOCK INDUSTRY

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The House will now proceed to the consideration of a motion to adjourn the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter requiring urgent consideration, namely the livestock industry.

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ) moved:

That this House do now adjourn.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to speak this evening. I want to thank your predecessor who occupied the chair this afternoon for approving this emergency debate.

We have heard a great deal from pork and beef producers, who are going through an unprecedented crisis. Until recently, producers were telling me that soon they would come en masse to Parliament Hill to make their demands, if the government refused to listen to reason and would not listen to their calls to deal with this crisis.

Obviously, we are holding an emergency debate because there is an emergency. We all understand the situation. I would like to thank the Chair again for allowing this debate on the crisis in the beef and pork industries.

The livestock industry is in crisis because of the rise in the value of the dollar and the costs of inputs, combined with a major drop in the price of meat in the case of pork and additional costs to manage and dispose of specified risk materials in the case of beef producers. In recent weeks, this House has heard all about the problems in the manufacturing and forestry industries. The increase in value of the dollar has often been mentioned as one of the major problems. It is also important to understand that there are exporters other than the people in the manufacturing and forestry industries. Of course, there are the pork and beef producers. These people also export their products and are also having problems because of the rise in the dollar. As I said, other factors also account for the crisis. I will come back to these a bit later.

In the case of beef producers, we remember the mad cow crisis and the border closures. In the case of pork producers, we can think of porcine circovirus and so on. These industries are truly in crisis. That is why it is really important to do something now.

Pork producers want an immediate program to guarantee loans or take over the interest currently assumed by producers, while beef producers want emergency measures such as a \$50 million program over two years to help them deal with the costs incurred as a result of the new specified risk material standards. New standards were imposed on Canadian and Quebec producers when it was determined as a result of the mad cow crisis that certain materials in cattle had to be removed. We must realize that producers are incurring higher costs because they are obliged now to get rid of these specified risk materials. These include, in particular, the spinal cord, eyes, cerebellum, and so forth. Certain parts must absolutely be removed before carcasses can be shipped for human consumption.

On the other hand, and this is the main problem, American producers are not obliged to do the same. This means additional

S. O. 52

costs for Canadian producers, who have asked for \$50 million over two years. This is far from extreme or exorbitant in view of the huge surplus that the federal government has been talking about this year. They have been talking about a surplus of nearly \$11 billion. However producers have been getting nothing but the cold shoulder.

This debate is needed because of the silence of the Prime Minister and the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food in the face of all the letters sent to them by producers in addition to the unanimous recommendations of all—and I wish to emphasize—of all the parties, including the party in power, which voted on the recommendations in the first report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food.

Entitled “Report on the Beef and Pork Sector Income Crisis”, the unanimous report recommends transitional measures to alleviate the crisis as well as more long-term measures to improve the competitiveness of the industry. Producers have appealed over and over for assistance. So far though, the government’s response has been nothing at all.

The government will surely talk this evening about the huge sums that have been allocated to these producers. What we hear in the field, though, is talk about producers who sometimes get an advance payment from the famous APP but two weeks later have to pay it back because they got money from the Farm Income Stabilization Program. What the government gives with one hand it takes away with the other. Producers have a serious problem when they hear talk about \$600 million having been allocated.

● (1905)

That means nothing to them because they cannot get the money that was announced.

I would like to say that I will be splitting my time with the member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot. I apologize for not saying that earlier. Her riding, in Quebec, is the one with the most hog producers, and obviously she wanted to speak this evening. So I believe that my new colleague has a strong interest in standing up for her producers, and I will be splitting my time with her. Thank you.

As I was saying, that is why we need to hold this debate, particularly in view of everything that is happening at present, so we can make this government see reason, when it has literally abandoned the pork and beef producers. In Quebec, there are 23,000 beef producers and 4,000 pork producers, and I mentioned the heavy concentration of producers in the riding of my colleague from Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot.

In my region, which extends from central Quebec to the Eastern Townships—the riding of Richmond—Arthabaska practically covers both those areas, obviously not completely, but in large part—there are 5,000 beef producers and nearly 700 pork producers. So a lot of people come in regularly to ask us to carry their message.

S. O. 52

As I was saying earlier, if we do not reach an agreement, if we do not find a solution to these problems, they will be coming to carry their message themselves. Now, we do not want that to happen. These people have got to the point where they are leaving home and coming all the way here to demonstrate. The beef and pork producers and the agricultural producers are not demonstrators, they are not paid to do that. In fact, they want to work on their land and produce food for the public. They have a lot of things to do other than come and carry placards in demonstrations. When people are at the end of their rope, however, there is nothing left to do but go on the road to make their demands heard, and rightly so.

I rise this evening on their behalf and I to call on the government to act. The opposition, and in particular the Bloc Québécois, is often accused of talking but doing nothing. I will remind this government that one party in this House rose in 2005 to say that supply management had to be protected. It introduced a motion. That motion was passed unanimously, and still today, at the World Trade Organization negotiations, that Bloc Québécois motion is still being used by the Canadian negotiators.

At present, we have grave concerns about the agreements drafted in Geneva. But we hope that Canada will stand firm and defend our producers and supply management system. That is action and not just talk. We are prepared to withstand the accusations. However, we want the government to walk the talk. That is what we are asking this evening.

As I was saying, the government response is that it has given a great deal. But these are recycled announcements. The same thing is announced over and over. That is the problem. This evening they will say that they provided more than \$70 million to combat circovirus. We do not deny it. We understand completely, but that will not solve the crisis.

Furthermore, the Secretary of State (Agriculture) and member for Mégantic—L'Érable was bragging that he went to Paris to tell the French that they were subsidizing their hog producers and that they had to put a stop to that. We do not oppose that. Naturally we understand that pressure must be brought to bear on other countries with respect to subsidies they provide to their agricultural sector. However, that will not solve the current crisis in any way, shape or form.

As I only have a few minutes left, I would like to read some very interesting quotes from those in the know about this crisis.

First, Christian Lacasse, President of the Union des producteurs agricoles du Québec said, "The situation is extremely precarious. Federal money must be forthcoming. There is no question about that."

Jean-Guy Vincent, President of the Fédération des producteurs de porcs du Québec, a resident of my riding, stated, "the situation has become untenable—" He also added that Ottawa remains silent. He is probably listening this evening. He absolutely wants this Conservative government, during its term of office, to respect its election promise to help hog production.

I will close with one last quote and then listen carefully to my colleagues' questions and comments. According to Michel Dessureault, President of the Fédération des producteurs de bovin du

Québec "—we constantly come back to see you and to tell you that producers are at the end of their rope. They cannot take even one more step. They have done their utmost."

In my opinion, if the government does not hear these alarm bells, I do not know what will spur it to action. I hope that this evening's emergency debate will get things moving.

• (1910)

[*English*]

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member explained how the Conservative government makes grand announcements but the money does not get to where it is supposed to go. I think the one he is talking about is the agri-invest and the advance payments program.

Would the member agree with me that this is really the case: the government pays money out with one hand under one government program and then it draws it back in the other government program; it makes the grand announcement but the farmer has no net benefit and, in fact, the government is paying itself? Is that not what is happening?

Diamond X Ranch Ltd., a producer in B.C., wrote a letter to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food. The first paragraph states:

In our mailbox the other day we received a check from the federal government for "cost of production". Now we have, in the past three years averaged one hundred and sixty-seven head of cows to calve each spring. The check was for \$316.32 which works out to approximately \$1.89 per head.

The writer asked:

How do you figure the cow/calf operator can produce a calf for \$1.89?

Would the member answer those two questions?

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Malpeque for his very pertinent questions. I must say that, having worked with him on the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food for some time now, I usually appreciate his contributions enormously. Even though we do not belong to the same party, we have certainly developed a sense of solidarity on this issue. I think the whole committee has that sense of solidarity. Earlier, I mentioned the unanimous report we produced. Some people in the Conservative Party seem to have understood, but they have not yet helped the minister understand what was going on.

The examples that the member just gave are good ones, and they are also tragic. I do not know how the minister responded to those cases. Producers have told me that they have not yet received a response to all the letters they wrote to ask the minister for help. Nevertheless, it is clear that these people cannot continue to live like this. They cannot survive on such ridiculous sums of money.

As I was saying, this evening, we will no doubt hear people on the government side talk about billions of dollars—some \$2.3 billion—that it injected to deal with these crises. But producers are telling us that they have not received a penny of it. The government knew that CAIS was not working, so it proposed AgriStability, which is a lot like CAIS and does not seem to work any better.

Producers have been receiving advance payments, only to be told two weeks later that they have to pay it back. That is a serious problem. The member for Malpeque may know more about this than I do, but I do know that in Saskatchewan, producers were told that they had been sent a cheque by mistake, which was too bad, but they had to pay it back. As if they needed that on top of everything else. These people have had it up to here!

The fact that this is happening proves that there are serious flaws. It is not that the government cannot fix these problems. It can attenuate the crisis. The committee, the members of the opposition, and agricultural producers gave it the means to do so a long time ago.

There are solutions out there, and it is up to the government to implement them.

•(1915)

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for initiating this debate this evening. This is a very serious matter.

However, I would like to point something out to him. The Liberals were in power for 13 years and I find it odd that the hon. member did not say a word about the 13 years of Liberal inaction.

[English]

As the member opposite knows, the Conservative government believes in designing programs and he mentioned them. We are very proud of our programs. The minister is proud of our programs. These programs were developed by farmers for farmers.

We know that for 13 years the Liberals created programs that were not really in the best interest of the farmer. We know that the Bloc, unfortunately, never developed a program and never will develop a program. The member must agree that these programs were developed by farmers for farmers.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Richmond—Arthabaska should know that the period for questions and comments is now over, but I will allow him a moment to reply.

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, since I only have a moment, I will say quite frankly that after the two years the government has been in power we are tired of hearing it blame the previous government. Let them read everything we said about the Liberal government when we were—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot.

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāi Thi Lac (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak today in this emergency debate on the current crisis in agriculture. I am also very pleased to support the hon. member for Richmond—Arthabaska in the presentation of his motion and I am pleased the Speaker agreed to hear this debate this evening.

Saint-Hyacinthe is the main city in my riding and it is an agri-food high-tech hub. However, the agri-food and agriculture sector is

S. O. 52

currently in crisis. I lived on a hog farm for more than seven years. I am very aware of what producers are going through right now.

The incomes of hog producers are atrocious. Soon many of them will have to hand their keys over to the banks because they are being choked by payments. Many farms will have to stop operating and start liquidating in the short term because of the programs the government has implemented and the money the government refuses to release quickly to help the producers.

The steep rise of the Canadian dollar has harmed producers immensely. The high price of inputs is another factor that is harming producers. The very low price producers have been getting for the past 16 months only adds to the catastrophic situation they are in.

The money currently being invested in the programs is not new because the programs have been recycled. The agricultural sector needs help now. Given the huge surpluses that the Conservative government has generated over the last few years and the surpluses that will be generated in the years to come, it has ample means to help farmers out.

In the cattle industry, farmers in Quebec and Canada are finding it very hard to keep up with our neighbours to the south because of all the competition and the fact that the Americans provide outrageous subsidies to their producers. Canadian agriculture is not helped either when food markets here buy meat from our neighbours to the south at ridiculous prices. Maybe the standards are not the same as the ones we impose on our farmers. So our farmers are facing unfair competition. The government should therefore assist the farmers who have been victimized by this.

My riding of Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot has been hit hard by job losses over the last two years: pork processing plants have closed and many workers have lost their jobs even though they were skilled. It is not easy under current conditions to find a new job, especially in a region where 25% of the jobs that are created are directly related to agriculture and agri-food.

I will fight tooth and nail for this because this sector is vital to my riding.

•(1920)

In addition, Quebec does not get its fair share of the payments. Quebec farmers have a shortfall to make up of more than \$150 million. The report tabled yesterday by the Pronovost commission urges the federal government to give Quebec its full share.

I have been sitting since just recently on the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, along with my colleague from Richmond—Arthabaska. I had an opportunity last week to ask the chair of the Canadian Swine Breeders' Association, Mr. Schlegel, if he had received any acknowledgement of the letter he sent to the Prime Minister regarding urgent assistance for farmers and what answer he got. He has not received any answer at all. The Prime Minister still has not replied to his letter. This is a slap in the face of very hardworking farmers. They need immediate help. The assistance currently announced will be available around April, but farmers need that money now.

S. O. 52

We can expect to see producers soon on the Hill, showing their disgust at the situation. The member for Richmond—Arthabaska and I will be at their side, and we will support their demands. I will not be there just because I am an elected member of Parliament, but because for many years I made my living from farming, so I feel directly affected. As I have said, I represent a riding that is highly agricultural.

A unanimous report tabled by the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food makes recommendations and suggests ways of quickly addressing the farm crisis. I cannot understand why the government does not make funding available immediately, and I mean immediately. Farmers need this money now. The government has the means and the opportunity to act now.

Personally, I believe that the Conservative government is acting in bad faith. I will go into the field and I will keep telling my farmers to fight. I will also tell them that I will be at their side in this crucial fight to keep farming alive in Quebec and Canada. We have always said that food is a basic need. But the crisis affecting farmers across this country is threatening Canada's ability to meet that basic need.

• (1925)

[English]

Hon. Carol Skelton (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Malpeque argued throughout the debate we had in the agricultural committee that we should completely ignore the WTO obligations and develop farm aid without any consideration for the disastrous consequences that countervail would have. Industry has repeatedly stated how bad this would be for its sector.

Could the member talk about the disastrous consequences that countervail would have for the industry, or would she agree with the member for Malpeque on that?

[Translation]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāi Thi Lac: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her question. The Conservative government is currently in power. I would like to reiterate what my hon. colleague from Richmond—Arthabaska said. I am tired of hearing my colleagues across the floor constantly return to the Liberals' proposals and their failure to act. But the Conservatives are the ones currently in power and in a position to help farmers.

The Bloc Québécois is calling on the government to respond to the needs of our farmers. As my hon. colleague from Richmond—Arthabaska clearly stated earlier, we sometimes agree with the positions taken by our opposition colleagues, but, first, I urge the government to respond quickly to this crisis.

[English]

Mr. Paul Steckle (Huron—Bruce, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I sincerely appreciate the passion which the member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot has put into this debate this evening.

As a farmer, as a hog producer, myself, I share some of the same sentiments that she has expressed. However, I find it rather odd to believe that we have a government now in power for two years and has as yet failed to deliver on many of the promises that were made.

Given the circumstances of farmers going broke, many of these farmers I believe, as they are in my riding and likely in hers as well, are working off farm to keep their operations going. Once they lose their operations, what impact does that have on their local communities, the schools, the churches and the small business operators? Could the member tell us what kind of a social impact that has on small communities?

• (1930)

[Translation]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāi Thi Lac: Mr. Speaker, this has an enormous social impact. Indeed, that is one thing we are seeing in our ridings. I represent a riding of 27 municipalities. In most of them that are primarily agricultural, we are seeing a mass exodus of the population to the larger centres. As the member mentioned, there are no jobs.

Consider this peculiarity. Often in Quebec, farms operate thanks to family members who work there. When there is no longer work for one family member, who often plays a minimal role in the business or is related to the employer, he or she might apply for employment insurance in order to compensate for the salary loss, but will be refused employment insurance benefits because he or she is related to the employer or plays a minimal role in the family business.

Thus, our farmers are facing a double injustice. Furthermore, this will considerably deter young farmers from stepping up to take over. Soon, we will have no one to take over the farms.

[English]

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for raising this debate. I think this debate is critical and I think it is time. It is really important that we talk about the situation this evening.

This is an important issue that we have discussed with different farmers right across this country. We are well aware of the situation as it is. As the member opposite knows, and all members opposite know or should know, this is the first government that actually puts farmers first.

We are very proud of putting farmers first. Our Conservative caucus is filled with farmers from across Canada. No other party understands agriculture or works harder for our farmers than the Conservative government. Not only is our caucus full of farmers, our minister is a farmer. No one in this Parliament understands or works harder for the Canadian farmer than our honourable minister.

Here are some of the actions that this minister has taken, immediate action: we took \$4.5 million for program payments in 2006; \$600 million for agri-invest kickstart money that is flowing right now; \$400 million to cover farmers increased input costs; and \$76 million to help farmers combat hog disease. And that is just a sampling.

S. O. 52

Let us compare that to what the former Liberal government did during 13 years. In the mid-90s, the Liberals cut \$400 million from agriculture programs. Just when agriculture was going through the most critical times, that is when they cut help to the farmers. Without speculating, would this be part of the reason that we are in the crisis that we are in now? Farmers had been neglected for more than a decade. So we can understand why they are facing the crisis they are.

On November 19, the industry received the long-awaited good news that the U.S. border was opening for older cattle. After years of Liberal immature bilateral relations, Canadian farmers saw what happens when the Conservative government works with its neighbours.

This was also good news for our world famous genetics industry, which can once again enjoy access to markets to the south. There is no question, however, that our livestock sector is facing difficulty. No one is more aware of that than the Conservative government and the Minister of Agriculture.

The Conservative government and, in fact, all ministers of agriculture across Canada are taking the situation facing our livestock producers very seriously. Every minister from coast to coast is determined to get help to livestock producers through existing programs, quickly.

The new agri-invest program is delivering \$600 million in federal funding to kickstart producer accounts. That is being done immediately. These payments are now being made to our producers. This is new money that the Conservative government has invested in Canadian farmers. These accounts will help farmers weather small drops in cash flow. We will make more help available with interim payments and targeted advances under agri-stability, the new margin-based program.

This is real action from the Conservative government to give the livestock industry some of the help that it needs because when farmers need help, they need help right away. We on the Conservative side understand that and we have acted. No longer will farmers have to wait 18 and 24 months to get help, like they used to have to wait under the former government.

I am pleased to report to this House that targeted advance payments have already been triggered for hog producers in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Quebec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. Interim payments are available for those who are not eligible for a TAP.

We know that timely access to program payments is critical for producers. Fast-tracking delivery of payments through existing programs still remains our goal. To this end, we are currently working with the provinces to fast-track 2008 agri-stability targeted advance payments, 2008 interim payments and 2007 final payments.

In regard to agri-invest kickstart payments, these funds are being deposited into producers' accounts directly.

● (1935)

Agri-stability, the new margin-based income stabilization program for large income losses, includes many improvements requested by the livestock sector such broader eligibility criteria for negative margin coverage, the targeted advance payment mechanism to

respond to disaster situations and a better method of valuing inventories.

Together, these changes are helping to ensure the program is more responsive to losses in the livestock sector.

Unlike Liberal governments that think that they know best when it comes to farm programs, we think that we should put the farmers first. That is why we sat down with farmers and redesigned our farm programs.

After hearing how bad the Liberal CAIS program worked, we replaced it with growing forward. How many of us heard time and again how horrible that CAIS program was?

Through these new industry requested programs, \$1.5 billion in cash payments is expected to flow to livestock producers from late 2007 to 2008. There is also up to \$1 billion in additional amounts available to the livestock sector through enhancements to the advance payments program.

Governments and industry have also been working together to identify ways that would help industry position itself to be competitive in the long term. I get feedback all the time from the industry that says, for once government is finally listening, and industry feels it is part of the decision making process and part of the solution.

These ways include: reducing the cost of implementing the enhanced feed ban; considering approaches for competitive inspection fees; increasing livestock, pork and beef sales abroad; and bringing innovative feed grain inputs and products to market even more rapidly.

To help hog producers manage disease, we have launched the circovirus inoculation program, with immediate federal assistance of \$25 million to producers to test and vaccinate hogs in Canada. This is the first of two phases of a \$76 million initiative to assist the hog industry in controlling diseases.

As well, to help our packers, who are a critical part of the equation, we have invested \$51 million to improve the temporary foreign workers program.

Building a foundation for the future is a topic and those are some of the actions the government is taking in the short term, but we are laying a firm foundation for the future, as well.

S. O. 52

When I met with the provincial and territorial agriculture ministers, we committed to work on some concrete goals for Canadian livestock producers. The situation will not be resolved by one-off responses. We are now in intense discussions with producers, the Canadian Cattlemen's Association, the Canadian Pork Council and the Canadian Meat Council to try to identify ways the government can respond to both the short and long term needs of the industry with their input.

We are sitting down with the industry and farmers and responding to their requests. Working groups on regulations, market access and business risk management have identified potential areas to work together. Discussions are proceeding.

The government is working with the national beef and pork value chain roundtables to address the long term competitiveness of this sector. Internationally, we are working hard to find new markets for Canadian products and we are working hard to maximize the markets we are already in.

The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and the Prime Minister are working harder than anyone before them to open new markets for our farmers.

I will let my colleague speak to our work in this area in more detail. Suffice it to say that wherever I go in the world, I push to maximize market access for Canadian livestock producers.

We are taking immediate action for our producers and we are taking action for the longer term. Why? Because I believe, and our government believes, that the future holds promise for the Canadian livestock sector.

There are challenges and we are working together to meet them, but at the same time, we need to change the terms of reference from crisis to opportunity.

As Hugh Lynch-Staunton, president of the Canadian Cattlemen's Association once said, "Negativity doesn't make bad times better. It's those who see opportunity in the future who are most likely to prosper".

The Conservative Party understands agriculture and is putting farmers first. We want farmers to have sustainable profitable farms and we are going to do what it takes to make sure that happens.

● (1940)

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, one has to wonder what we are doing here. According to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, all is for the best in the best of worlds. He is wearing his rose-coloured glasses this evening. He was in attendance at meetings where witnesses told the committee about the urgency of the situation and the serious crisis in the cattle and pork industry. I cannot understand his position. Better yet, the parliamentary secretary and the committee members from his party signed the unanimous report containing six recommendations in which the suggestion was made to the government to consider the possibility of helping these industries.

I would like to respond to the member from the Conservative Party who told my colleague from Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot that there might be some danger with respect to the WTO. I was laughed at, here in this House, when we called for article 28 to be used to limit imports of milk protein. The minister shouted insults at me. At committee, officials told me that I was doing a dangerous thing. A few months later, while the Bloc Québécois may not be doing anything, under pressure from us and from producers, article 28 was used.

I would like to ask the parliamentary secretary where he was when these committee meetings were held. Did he agree with the six recommendations in the first report of the Committee on Agriculture, which was adopted unanimously? Does he agree with those six recommendations?

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. It is no doubt a good question and I am prepared to answer it. Yes, I was in attendance and I listened. We are not being told the whole story and everything that was said by the witnesses.

[*English*]

I was there at the same time that my colleague and other members of the agriculture committee were there. We had great representation from some people in the livestock industry who were going through some very tough times. They told us that they had problems with the high dollar, which was having a great impact on their businesses. They also mentioned high feed costs. They mentioned that they were going through a cycle with low prices.

But one thing they said was that they wanted a long term fix. They wanted us to get this right. They wanted some help, but they did not want money that was going to be countervailable. They wanted us to figure out, in consultation with them, how to do something constructive to make sure they remain profitable and sustainable for the long term. That is what we and our minister are working toward. That is what this government wants. We want a good, strong agricultural industry forever.

● (1945)

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, is the parliamentary secretary living in la-la land? Where is he?

The parliamentary secretary said that tonight's debate is critical and that it is important to talk about this issue this evening, but might I say to the parliamentary secretary that the time for talking is over? The time for action is now. The time for action was in December. The minister raised expectations but still did not come through with any money.

The member can say what he likes about Liberals and Conservatives, but I can tell him that farmers out there who are going broke tonight really do not care about political rhetoric. The parliamentary secretary can try to leave the impression that Liberals did not put money out there, but we put a record amount of money out there in those years—

Mr. Leon Benoit: A record low.

Hon. Wayne Easter: —and I will admit that it was not enough, but we were developing programs for farmers, which that government has failed to do.

Let me ask the parliamentary secretary two questions. He talked about the border opening in November for cattle that were over 30 months. The fact of the matter is that when we were in government that border was supposed to open in June 2006.

What were you doing for all those months? Sleeping? Why did it not open—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The member was very good. He was putting questions through the chair, then suddenly he lost it.

We will go to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Mr. Speaker, that is rich coming from that member. I would almost be embarrassed if I had been a member of that Liberal government for 13 years. I would not dare to ask a question about agriculture. For 13 years farmers were neglected.

Here is what has happened since the Conservatives have taken over. We provided \$4.5 billion for program payments in 2006, \$600 million for the AgriInvest kickstart, \$400 million to cover farmers' increased input costs, and \$76 million to help farmers combat hog disease.

On September 27, 2007, we provided almost \$1 million to help the Canadian agriculture industry. On September 21, 2007, we provided \$2.6 million for Alberta's agri-processing. On September 21, we provided \$1.5 million in funding for Canada's beef exports. On September 21, 2007, we allowed a deferral in the collection of interest on overpayments. On December 14, we gave \$305,000 to the Canadian Cattlemen's Association. The list goes on and on.

Mr. Farmer, for 13 years nothing happened. Now farmers are getting their fair share.

The Deputy Speaker: I am sure the hon. member meant to say "Mr. Speaker".

On a point of order, the hon. member for Malpeque.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary forgot to mention that they gave \$660,000 to—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. That does not sound like a point of order to me.

I am trying to get in as many people as we can here. The hon. member for Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar.

Hon. Carol Skelton (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, trade was one of the things that we looked at over the time of committee and so on. We looked at what the minister had been doing for agriculture, what markets he was visiting and what governments he was dealing with. One thing we found out was that many of the provincial governments had not completed their agreements with him.

I would like to ask the parliamentary secretary to tell us a little about what countries the minister has travelled to and what negotiations and agreements he is working on.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Mr. Speaker, what a great question after the other less than great questions that I have just received.

The member's question gives me the opportunity to explain what the minister has done for agriculture in the short time that he has

S. O. 52

been the Minister of Agriculture. The government and the minister have worked tirelessly to open new markets for our Canadian beef. I ask members to please pay attention to the list of markets we have opened access to: Japan, Mexico, Hong Kong, Egypt, Russia, Macau, the Philippines and the United States. We did what the Liberals failed to do: we reopened the U.S. border.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would have liked the list that the parliamentary secretary just read out to have included some other places in Canada, and more specifically in Quebec, that the minister had visited, such as Abitibi-Témiscamingue. I would like him to pass that message on to his minister. We do not often see him in our area, and our farmers would like to see him.

Here is a good example.

We have a plan in my riding. We want to complete the processing cycle of beef and pork—from the farmer to the market. But there is no slaughterhouse. Well, there is one. There is a facility, in Fugèreville, and \$4 million was invested in that facility, which is all set to operate, by the way.

The Conservatives have been in power for two years, and for two years we have been writing to the two ministers. But we have not even received an acknowledgement of receipt saying that the plan was being reviewed.

Does the minister read the letters we send? Will the farmers of Témiscamingue—because I am talking about Témiscamingue and Abitibi-Témiscamingue—at least be able to have the missing link, the slaughterhouse in Fugèreville?

• (1950)

[*English*]

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Mr. Speaker, the truth of the matter, as the member said, is that this government takes the agricultural situation in Quebec very seriously. The government has appointed a secretary of state who is exclusively responsible for agriculture and who hails from Quebec.

The member questioned the two years of action and I listed off the countries. He wants even more. Let us get at the truth of the matter. What have the Bloc members done in the 17 years they have been around here? Nothing. They mentioned they were going to be beside these people demonstrating and doing all kinds of wonderful things and that is good, but how does it help farmers to go demonstrating?

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to speak in this emergency debate tonight. I congratulate my colleague from Richmond—Arthabaska for forcing the issue. I just wish that as we approach the middle of February we did not still have to speak on this issue.

The government has absolutely failed to act in a decisive and constructive way to deal with the hog and beef crisis. Farmers, fellow Liberals, other opposition parties and I have been raising the seriousness of the hog and beef crisis since last fall, but the government failed to act.

S. O. 52

I know that most economists are saying that the government has failed to act prudently in its fiscal management and that its financial reserves are basically blown, but governments, even though they manage the finances of the nation incompetently, have a responsibility to act in a time of crisis, as the previous government did with SARS, with 9/11 and with BSE. The government should not deny farmers their rightful assistance in time of need just because the government itself has been incompetent in its fiscal management.

In fact, governments at all levels have encouraged farmers to increase production, to become more efficient, to invest in technology and to export. Farmers lived up to that responsibility. They produced, and they produced efficiently, to the point that last fall producers were really exporting about 60% of the hogs, or pork, and 50% of beef, or meat.

The bottom line is that the producers lived up to their end of the bargain. It is time that the federal government lived up to its responsibility.

I know that a lot of the previous minister's time was spent attacking and undermining the Canadian Wheat Board. It seems the current minister is spending a lot of time on it as well. Some people are telling me that the Conservative government is better at destroying than it is at building. Certainly in regard to the Wheat Board issue it is trying to destroy the Wheat Board. It is even in the process of trying to destroy the Canadian Grain Commission.

But for heaven's sake, let us not allow the government to destroy the beef and hog industry by neglect. The minister has a responsibility to spend some time on this issue, regardless of the ideology of the Prime Minister in his wont to kill the Canadian Wheat Board.

To its credit, the all party standing committee did recognize the crisis and did in fact act. We held hearings. I will get to some of those points in a minute, but I want put on the record a couple of things that were said at committee and the dates on which they were said.

On November 26, 2007, Brad Wildeman, chair of the Canadian Cattlemen's Association, said:

There truly is a crisis occurring at this moment in the livestock industry. It's both an income crisis and an input cost crisis. Both pressures are occurring at the same time.

There are many factors creating this situation, and thus there needs to be a combination of actions forming a solution. I would also add that I sense a crisis of confidence in the industry.

At that same hearing on that same date, Mr. Curtiss Littlejohn, director, Canadian Pork Council, stated:

The Canadian hog producers are facing a financial crisis that is unprecedented in terms of cause and unparalleled in terms of negative outlook. Simply put, prices are collapsing, input costs have increased dramatically and cash losses are mounting at such astonishing rates that entire communities, including producers and their input suppliers, face financial ruin. Most disturbing is the observation that no positive market correction in the foreseeable future seems apparent.

● (1955)

We now know there will be a market correction by the summer or late fall, so it is not hopeless. However, the industry needs assistance in its liquidity capital to get through this period of crisis so it can seize the opportunity again.

There are a number of recommendations in this report, and I will not go into them. They are available. They are in the December report, which was, as my colleague said earlier, a unanimous report by the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food. I congratulate all members of that committee because they did their work in a non-partisan way and came up with solutions.

The farm leadership was speaking in those quotes. Farm leadership tries to be diplomatic, but I have talked to members on this side of House who received calls directly from producers and they were not so diplomatic, and understandably so.

People are calling in tears. People are seeing their life's work go down the drain. All the parliamentary secretary can talk about is political rhetoric. People are losing their homes. Generations that have served on those farms are losing their life's work. That is unacceptable.

In a community close to home, in a five mile circle, 13 hog producers have gone out of business. That is the situation. People are losing from \$40 to \$70 a hog. Some of them are losing up to \$3,000 a day. Every day that goes by, they lose more and the government fails to act.

The beef industry is in very serious trouble as well. One producer told me that in the spring he sold cattle for \$1,400. Last fall he sold them for \$900, a \$500 loss. Again, the government fails to act. We are seeing fourth, fifth and sixth generation farmers go under, family farms. As I said, it is a loss of heritage and it is unacceptable.

Farmers in the hog and beef industry have done the honourable thing. They are producing food for Canadian society and others around the world. They are the price takers in the industry. Everybody else in the industry is doing not too badly, but farmers are price takers and are losing their shirts. They are the generators of wealth in this industry. If we lose them, we virtually lose the industry, and we could lose our food security as a nation.

What does the government do as this tragedy gets worse day by day? It does absolutely nothing. Conservatives can use talking points that come out of the Prime Minister's office, but talking points do not put cash in the pockets of producers. It is time the minister acted and acted responsibly.

Yes, we recognize the rise in the dollar had some impact. So do higher feed costs, as the parliamentary secretary said. It is a positive sign that grains and oilseed producers are getting fair returns. We want to see that, but there has to be balance in the industry. It has to be complementary to one another. We want to see them continue to earn profits.

Part of the reason for the higher costs and the escalation in prices is the push for ethanol. We support the push for ethanol but, for heaven's sake, as politicians we also have to accept responsibility. If government policy of doing the right thing for the environment and greenhouse gases is pushing up the prices of inputs for one sector in the livestock industry, then this place, and especially the government, has a responsibility of assisting farmers in their time of need.

Again, it is time the government started to act and act responsibly. It is a matter not just of farmers and their families; it is a matter over the longer term of food security for people who live in the cities and urban centres of this country. Do they want to depend on imported food for their tables? I think not.

● (2000)

Canadians want Canadians to produce their food, to have the quality food, the safe food that goes on our table. I want urbanites to understand that because of the government's lack of action, we are losing our right to food sovereignty every day.

The report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture was tabled in the House in December. However, as I said, the government failed to act on the recommendations. All farmers, all organizations stated that they needed a solution before Christmas.

Why has the minister failed to act? Is it because the Prime Minister does not care? Is that the reason? Is it because there is no political will to support farmers? The parliamentary secretary said that the Conservative caucus was full of farmers. Where are they? Why are they not speaking up? Has the Prime Minister got a gag order on them like he put on the Canadian Wheat Board and like he now has tried to put on the Canadian Grain Commission? Are those backbenchers in the Conservative Party voiceless? We want to hear them speak up. We hear them talk at committee, but we do not hear them say something has to be done immediately.

Is there no money there producers because the Conservative Minister of Finance has managed the finances of the nation so incompetently? Is that the reason? Or is it because the minister just wants rationalization in the industry? Let the market do its thing. Let us lose producers and the big and the strong will survive. Is that the position of the Conservative government? It sounds like the economic theory that the Prime Minister used talk about when he was head of a former organization.

We are talking about rural Canada. These are the lives of people and it is time the government acted.

We heard the parliamentary secretary's words earlier. He said that the minister made an announcement. He announced money at Christmas time. He raised expectations, but the money did not flow.

One producer wrote me a letter about that money. Cindy Duncan McMillan said this:

I find it interesting to read [the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food's] assurance that his government is doing a great job of looking after producers. Tell me, if it's such a great job, why does it hurt so much?

That is the reality. If the government will not act, then this financial liquidity problem will rebound right through society as a whole.

I said earlier that there was tremendous potential for this industry down the road, but the industry had to survive between last fall and probably next fall.

I watched in January, hoping against hope that the minister would come through. He did make four announcements. He announced the \$600 million agri-invest program four times, but that does not do any good to hog and beef producers. Why can the Conservatives not understand that? Taking money out of one pocket from the

S. O. 52

government and paying the government back on the other is not putting money in the pockets of producers.

What did we do as a committee? We called the Canadian Pork Council and the Canadian Cattlemen's Association into a meeting on January 29 to hear what they thought of the program. Was it working?

I will deal with the pork side. Here is what they had to say. The parliamentary secretary said things were working? Let us hear what they had to say on January 31. Mr. Stephen Moffett, director of the Canada Pork Council said:

To carry on, then, to answer the second question—how we think the government has responded to our requests and to this very severe situation—I can tell you that we are pretty disappointed at this point by the response from the government.

The president of the Canada Pork Council said:

Let me be clear that the December 19th response was a cruel joke to many of our producers. There were false hopes and false assumptions and false expectations that simply weren't deliverable.

● (2005)

There is the answer on what the government has done. Those are the folks who understand what is happening on the ground, and the talking points by the PMO just do not cut it.

On January 31, I believe the minister in response to a question in the House, two days after the pork council said that, said that he met "this morning and with the Canadian Pork Council. They are quite happy with the direction we are going".

When for heaven's sake is the minister and the government going to listen? When are they going to try to stop baffling us with baloney? Enough of this malarkey. People are hurting out there. They need cash. They need it now. They needed it in December. It is time the government delivered.

There are though some things that can be done. I said it earlier and I will say it again. I wonder if the government, the minister and the parliamentary secretary are living in la-la land or wherever these days.

Let me give them some suggestions. I could read letter after letter, as could any member, of hurt, pain and tears. Farmers are seeing their life's work go down the drain and unnecessarily so. There are all kinds of ways the government could act. I will raise a few.

The government could put cash in the hands of beef producers immediately by making a special 2007 CAIS advance payment of up to \$100 per cow and \$150 for feeder cattle. The parliamentary secretary talked earlier about doing away with CAIS. Changing the name of CAIS to agristability does not change the program. He should understand that.

It could put cash in the hands of hog producers and implement an immediate short term loan for Canadian hog farmers to improve cashflow as markets adjust. The government could put on an immediate priority basis on 2006 CAIS payments and 2007 CAIS payments targeted and interim advance payments for all hog and beef producers.

S. O. 52

The government could amend the security require so farmers did not have this money drawn back. It could delink CAIS payment offsets with advances given. It could extend time restrictions on advances. It could allow hog and beef producers to be given the option of having the top 15% of CAIS or the new agri-investment program for at least 2007 and 2008 and maintain the \$600 million agri-investment kick-start already announced. In other words, give them the option of what would work best for them.

Why does the government not consider those suggestions? It could defer not only interest payments, but also clawback on all CAIS overpayments to hog and beef producers until December 2008.

The federal government has a duty and a responsibility to act, as the previous Liberal governments understood. We acted on potatoes, PVYn, BSE, poultry and on ad hoc payments for the grain and oilseeds industry when the safety nets did not do the job. Using the safety nets as an excuse is just unacceptable.

Simply put, the current government has not demonstrated any intent to respond to the farm crisis and this is absolutely unacceptable. We ask the government tonight, in this emergency debate, to take from this discussion the responsibility to act and get money out to producers now.

• (2010)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Before I go to questions and comments, I received a written question asking whether hon. members have to sit in their own seats. During an emergency debate, the answer is no.

Questions and comments, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food.

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my hon. colleague's speech and there were a lot of things to which I take exception.

I really take exception to a lot of the political rhetoric. I take exception to a lot of the quotes he has taken out of context that were made at committee. The thing that really went over the top was when he quoted a letter he received from a lady by the name of Cindy Duncan McMillan. He pulled at everybody's heartstrings with that wonderful letter from that person.

I would like to tell this House, and I would like to tell every Canadian, every farmer who is out there depending on the agriculture critic for the official opposition, that this person, Cindy Duncan McMillan, happens to be the Liberal candidate in Pontiac.

How much integrity does the member bring to this discussion if he is using candidates? The irony of all this is that this is going on while the Liberals are having an auction to spend time with some of his colleagues.

I want to ask him a very specific question. I just quoted eight bilateral agreements that our minister made since his appointment. In 13 years, the member and his party had two. What does he think of that? That is what I would like to ask him.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, I would like to comment on some of the comments the member made, but let me answer his question directly.

He should be thanking Andy Mitchell, who was the previous minister, for laying the groundwork so that the Conservatives could get to those agreements, just as they should thank the previous minister for really doing the negotiations on getting the border open, because it was supposed to open in June 2006 but the Conservatives just could not get the job done until 18 months later.

I think it is pretty darn degrading for the parliamentary secretary to attack a beef producer as if that lady did not have any rights to write the minister or me or anybody else. Whether she is a candidate or not is beside the point. It is beside the point. She is a beef producer and she has written a letter.

I will read another letter that was written to Minister Ritz, and maybe the parliamentary secretary could—

• (2015)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Malpeque should perhaps wind down his reply so that we can have other questions, but what drew my attention is that he named another member of the House by name, and with all his experience, he should know not to do that.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Laval.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask a question of my colleague from Malpeque, whom I thank for his speech.

In recent weeks, we have had to sign a slapdash agreement because the government had promised money for the manufacturing and forestry industries. That money was promised as blackmail. Now we see that the beef and pork producers will be receiving money under a program that will only come into effect in April.

Does he not have the impression that the people of Canada and Quebec are being somewhat held hostage in the various programs that the government wants to institute? Does he not have somewhat the impression that this is the case both for beef and pork producers and for the manufacturing and forestry industries? We are seeing a strong trend. Could he answer me on this?

[English]

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, I would answer the question by saying that not only have Canadians been held hostage by the government, as we quite obviously can see in terms of its performance on the agriculture file and especially as it relates to the beef and hog industry, but the rural backbench members are being held hostage. The backbench members are almost like a bunch of trained seals. They must be held hostage by the Prime Minister's Office too. We have heard the talking points from the PMO tonight from the parliamentary secretary, but we really have not heard much substance.

I guess that is what worries me about the government. It is pretty good at messaging. We saw the message from the minister in December that he was going to do something, but where was the delivery? It just did not happen.

S. O. 52

There is talk of an election in the air, and maybe, just maybe, as the Conservatives did for the forestry sector, if you remember, Mr. Speaker, they even tried to buy your province in the last budget. It did not work, of course, but they did try to buy it. That is what we can expect from that kind of a government.

Hon. Raymond Simard (Saint Boniface, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for his passionate plea on behalf of farmers and pork producers. We have all been approached by pork producers lately and have heard their pleas for our assistance. I am very pleased that the hon. member has taken that seriously.

I also had the privilege of meeting people from the Canadian Pork Council at the industry committee last week and what they are asking for does not seem unreasonable. They are looking for repayable short term loans.

We have seen what happened in the manufacturing sector. Is it a matter of ideology that the government will not provide short term assistance for these people? I would also like my colleague to explain that once we have lost this industry, we cannot just get it back again. A farm, after going bankrupt or whatever, cannot set up and start over the next day. That is something we have not mentioned and it is very important for Canadians to hear.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, my colleague has worked hard on this file as he has worked hard on the Canadian Wheat Board file and the Canadian Grain Commission file.

To a great extent I believe it is a matter of ideology. I said in my remarks that maybe this is the minister's or the Prime Minister's way of letting the industry rationalize; just let it rationalize, let the market do its thing and we lose 50% of producers and life will go on and rural communities will be less. Maybe that is the minister's objective, just to let that happen. That is if it is an ideological question. That is certainly a possibility.

One of the members from the government side said earlier that we were asking for money and to heck with whether they are countervailable or not. I do not think anyone heard me say that in my remarks.

I will admit that I that thought at one point in time that maybe it would be good to put farmers first and trade priorities second. That is what individual producers are saying out there. They are saying what good is the trade agreement to them if at the end of the day they are broke and out of business. We have to look at that. There are ways of doing it that it is not countervailable. I outlined about seven or eight points tonight. There are ways of doing it.

• (2020)

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member for Malpeque and I heard very little offered as solutions.

The one thing he did mention is that there should be a per head payment for livestock. The last time that happened was in 1975. It destroyed the cattle industry in Canada and it took more than 10 years for the industry to recover.

Two things would happen with what the member recommended. First of all, because it would be contravening trade deals, the borders would be closed and roughly 50% of Canadian production would be

eliminated, no market whatsoever. That would damage the industry. The second thing that would happen is the hog and cattle numbers would not be reduced like they should and that as well would lead to a wreck in the industry like we saw in 1975.

How could the member be so callous as to propose a solution to the problem that has been proven to fail in the past and would fail miserably again?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Malpeque should know that the question period is over, but I will allow him equal time, one minute.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is amazing how the member for Vegreville—Wainwright only hears what he wants to hear. I would ask him to go back to the record and he will see it is not as he said. That is a proposal that the cattlemen put to us that is not countervailable.

At the end of my remarks I listed quite a number of solutions. I never heard anything from the parliamentary secretary. If I had time, I would show the member a list of 11 programs and how the previous government did it during the BSE crisis, how we put 11 programs in place that put money out there that basically saved the industry at the time.

Maybe the member could look at the history and learn a few lessons. The Conservatives could drop their ideology for a little bit and get out there and actually do what they claim to do and put farmers first.

[Translation]

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to thank my colleague, the member for Richmond—Arthabaska, for requesting this emergency debate. I would also like to thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing the debate this evening. It is extremely important. Why? Because there is a crisis, the rising dollar and rising input costs, and the additional costs for managing and disposing of specified risk materials.

At the committee meetings, we hear that there is a crisis and that families and people are suffering. We also hear that no one is doing anything. That is the problem. Something must be done. And so we tabled a report in December, after listening to and hearing the testimony of the pork and livestock producers. We were all in agreement, and we made unanimous recommendations.

I will give you an example of those recommendations.

• (2025)

[English]

Before I speak to the recommendations by the all party committee, let us look at the chain of events. We had an urgent meeting with the cattle and pork producers last fall in November. Our committee worked hard and came out with a report containing six recommendations. In the next meeting we had with the pork and cattle producers, we were told that if those recommendations had been followed there would have been no need for us to be here today and no need for them even to be at that meeting in January.

What kind of recommendations were they? Recommendation 1 reads:

S. O. 52

The Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food recommends that Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada deploy, before the end of 2007, a special transitional measure that will provide cash-flow in the form of interest-free loans to be paid back over a period of three to five years, and bankable cash advances to hog and cattle producers.

That seems to be a reasonable request, which, once again, was agreed to by all members of our committee.

Our producers are, I would say, the best in the world. They do not want handouts. They want a bit of assistance in the form of loans so they can get through what we call *la tempête*, the storm, the perfect storm for farmers right now.

What was the second recommendation. Recommendation 2 reads:

The Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food recommends that Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, in partnership with the provinces and territories, payout the remaining percentage owed to producers under the CAIS Inventory Transition Initiative...and respect the federal-provincial funding agreement.

I could go on and list the other recommendations but most people in this area have read them.

The problem is that when approached with our recommendations or with a request, the answer from the minister and the government is that we should look at the billions of dollars that it has put into agriculture and look at all the good programs that have been renamed. It tells us that everything is fine but it is not fine.

Let us go back a bit to November 27. As a result of the first meeting we had with the producers, I wrote a letter to the minister and personally delivered it to him. In the letter, I very politely told him what we in the committee had gone over and that everybody would like his help to move the file forward. At that committee, I was able to pinpoint three things that at that time we thought were the key: first, the elimination of inspections at slaughterhouses and at the border; second, immediate loan guarantees; and third, additional specified risk material funding to assist rendering facilities with disposal.

To my knowledge, those have not yet been implemented nor put into place.

The theme that we heard at that meeting in November was that our producers wanted a level playing field to compete, not with other producers, but with foreign governments that give subsidies and that help their farmers and their producers, the kind of assistance that we do not have here.

My November letter continues to state:

As we continue to play by trade rules our producers continue to get hammered. Somehow we have to give them the support they need to be able to compete fairly.

A couple of months went by and we were contacted by our friends, the producers, in all provinces. We had been contacted before. This was not a crisis that all of a sudden appeared. It was a crisis that had been growing due to the high dollar, the costs and other factors involved.

We had another meeting. As a result of the meeting in January, I again wrote a letter to the minister, as I always try to do, in a courteous way, as a follow up to our meeting, and told him that this was for his information and told him what we had here hoping there would be some action.

●(2030)

My letter reads:

The Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food heard today from witnesses representing the Canadian Cattlemen's Association and the Canadian Pork Council. The main message we received in regard to the current crisis in the pork and cattle industry is that there has been enough talking. Action is urgently needed immediately.

Our cattle and pork producers have reached their limit and feel abandoned by the lack of a positive response from this government. It will interest you to know that the announcement on December 19, 2008 to deliver federal aid to farmers is being widely perceived as a "cruel joke".

This was something that was told to us by people in the committee. My letter continues to state:

In fact, they are saying February 01, 2008 will forever be remembered as "Black Friday" by the pork industry in Canada.

Those are the words of the producers. In other words, the announcements that were made in December and all the good things that the government was supposed to be doing still have not had any effect because farms are being foreclosed, they are not able to continue, our rural communities are in danger of dying and we hear talk.

My letter further states:

As you know, our all-party committee made a number of recommendations that if implemented would bring immediate assistance to those affected. We have been repeatedly told that guaranteed loans would be able to keep our producers alive until long-term programs are in place and producers have had the opportunity to adjust to the new market forces.

As we work on long-term solutions and new business risk programs....

I am not saying that what the government is proposing is bad. There is good intention. After all, there are farmers on the government side as well as on the opposition side. However, as we look at these long term solutions, we must not overlook the fact that urgent help is needed now.

When I was first elected in 2006, I recall a crisis in Porcupine Plain, Saskatchewan. I believe it was a drought or flooding. The farmers were hurting so we approached the federal government. It said that it was a provincial government responsibility and the provincial government said that it was a federal government responsibility. As the governments could not seem to get together, farmers were hurting and suffering. I have personal accounts of farmers saying that their phone lines have been cut, their credit has gone and yet there has not been any immediate aid.

Let us look at what is happening. In this case, it is an industry in crisis. It did not happen recently. Representatives met with the committee and there is a report. There was another meeting with the committee and still no action. When this is discussed among members of Parliament we often say that it is the bureaucrats.

I have a high regard for the professionals in our public civil service. Civil servants do their jobs. The ones I have met in the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food and those who have taken time to come to my office know their jobs. If they are given a direction, they will take it. I have come to the conclusion that if nothing is happening, then obviously there is no political will.

Why would I say that? Let us look at what the government is trying to do in regard to the Canadian Wheat Board: to move fast, the sham task force, names off the voter list, the firing of the CEO, the gag orders and the ambiguous plebiscite. Had it not been for a farmers' coalition, a court ruling and the opposition in committee and in the House, we would not have a single desk. We would not have a Wheat Board and the Wheat Board would be going the way of other grain companies in Canada controlled by the multinationals.

What I am saying is that governments can move fast and, in that instance, it was trying to move and it was moving fast but we had to stop them. If it can move fast on that issue, why can it not move to get some loan guarantees for our pork and cattle producers now? I do not quite understand what is happening.

Let us look at some of the things that were said at the committee meeting. Mr. Stephen Moffett, director of the Canadian Pork Council, stated:

To carry on, then, to answer the second question—how we think the government has responded to our requests and to this very severe situation—I can tell you that we are pretty disappointed at this point by the response from the government. Clare indicated that the major problem is liquidity in our industry and the fact that this downturn is much more severe than a normal downturn because of the ethanol and corn issue—

● (2035)

That is another issue that has been raised recently.

He went on to say:

—and because of the Canadian dollar and just the normal price swings in hogs. This has been a much more severe downturn.

It goes on and on. We have heard many testimonies.

The same gentleman goes on to state:

What have we heard from government? Certainly, right from the very start they have been saying that we need to deal with the existing programs: "Let's do what we can with existing programs." I can tell you, we don't think that's enough."

The message that seems to be coming from our producers is that nothing is happening immediately to stop the small farms from going under or the producers from losing money even though they have had promises of a lot of big programs. The point is that the industry is in crisis and we must get moving.

I would like to read from a press release put out by the National Farmers Union. The headline reads, "LIVESTOCK PRICE CRASH A RESULT OF DYSFUNCTIONAL MARKETPLACE". The press release is about the overall livestock industry and it states that it is not a good one, if the information is correct.

The president of the National Farmers Union said:

...the dysfunctional livestock marketplace is the result of a situation where a handful of large corporations dominate the industry. In fact, a single company, Cargill, owns half the packing capacity in Canada and is able to heavily influence prices at both the farm gate and at the wholesale/retail level. A rising Canadian dollar is just a small factor in this larger equation.

My colleague, the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster, has undertaken a mission to expose the whole security and prosperity partnership in Canada. Hearings have been held in my riding where over 400 people showed up in Nelson to hear him speak on this proposed integration of Canada with its partners Mexico and the U.S. driven by the corporate agenda.

S. O. 52

What we see here in this press release and what we see in the agriculture sector is the consolidation of big companies driving us in this direction. Therefore, we need to be careful. We need to keep our food security issues in our own hands. If we allow the takeover of our livestock industry by multinational corporations, influenced by other governments, our producers will lose a say in what is happening.

I would like to applaud the minister for his push on cooperatives in the biofuel sector. We are holding committee hearings on the biofuel sector but that is not enough. We need a firm commitment by government to help our pork and cattle producers.

In the same press release, Stewart Wells, from the National Farmers Union, said:

The long-term solution to the livestock crisis is to restore farmers' market power and limit the economic power of the big companies, stated Wells. In the meantime, short-term emergency measures are needed to get farmers through this period and allow them to stay in business. He noted that this investment needs to be targeted to farmers, in particular family cow-calf and sow barn operations. "If we lose the foundation of these sectors, we'll lose the whole industry eventually," he noted.

I am new to this area. I have been on the agriculture committee for a couple of years. I have an idea of what is happening. I see an industry that is struggling. We have an upswing in the grains and oilseeds, thanks to many different factors, but we also have a downswing in the pork and cattle industry.

The other thing I have observed is that more and more Canadians are looking at this whole area of food security and food sovereignty. In my opinion, if we do not support our producers, if we do not allow our family farms to survive and if we do not give them help right now to weather the storm, we will not have an industry. We will not be able to feed ourselves. As we go further on in this century, as we realize the cost of fossil fuels and transportation is increasing, we need to somehow ensure that Canada, first and foremost, can feed itself and, at the same time, have a fair say in the whole export market.

● (2040)

At this point in time, I would once again like to thank my hon. colleague for having asked for this debate. I think it is vital and crucial. Emergency debates do not just happen all the time.

[*Translation*]

I note, Mr. Speaker, that you said yes to this debate because you believe it is important. You saw the proposal, you read the letter from my colleague and you decided that this debate is very important.

[*English*]

We are here not to just bat words back and forth, we are here to raise the issues, to talk to each other, and hopefully we will come out of this tomorrow and decisions will be made to do something.

As I mentioned, we have a civil service of capable people. We have a government that says it cares. We hear this all the time. I do not doubt the sincerity, but we need action. Actions, as we know, speak louder than words.

S. O. 52

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the comments of my hon. colleague with great interest. There are a couple of things he mentioned that I would like to give some further input on. He mentioned the provincial and federal governments working together. I have a quote that I would like to get his opinion on a little bit later.

He also mentioned the Wheat Board. I am not sure who this member represents and whether his riding consists of a lot of farmers. I note that the critic for the Wheat Board actually has no wheat farmers in his riding. I am not sure how many farmers this member represents.

As far as I know, the NDP, generally speaking, is a lot like the Liberal Party. It does not necessarily represent rural Canada, it is centred more in urban Canada. But that is for another day.

There are a couple of quotes that I would like to get the member's opinion on. He quoted a couple of quotes that we heard in committee.

Here's one that says:

We're also very happy they spent the amount of time they did discussing the livestock situation. Again that's a clear indication of how serious they realize the situation is. We applaud them for that as well.

That is a quote from Bob Friesen. We also have the Canadian Cattlemen's Association saying:

The enhanced APP will benefit producers by allowing them greater access to funding. Prior to this, a producer had to be enrolled in the Canadian Agriculture Income Stability (CAIS) program and have a positive reference margin to be eligible. Now, producers will be eligible even if they have a negative reference margin and can borrow up to 50 per cent of the value of the animals they borrowed against.

The point that we are trying to make here—

An hon. member: Time, time.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Everybody is interested in my time. I would like to get this member's opinion on what he thinks of these quotes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I think the situation has resolved itself. This is a time for questions, not to have another speech from the parliamentary secretary. We have heard quite enough from him.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I appreciate the hon. member's advice.

The hon. member for British Columbia Southern Interior.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Speaker, I believe there was a question, so I will get to it. First of all, we have heard this argument before from the government side. "Well, you are from Prince Edward Island, what do you know about the Wheat Board?" "You are from Quebec, what do you know about the Wheat Board?" "Or, you are from British Columbia."

Well, I will tell the member something. We hear from farmers. If the hon. member would like to come to my office, I will show him letters, individual letters that people have written. If he wants a record of the phone calls that we have had, the people we have talked

to, and the trips that we have made, we will certainly share that with him.

As far as me personally, in farming, I can tell the member this. When I was this high, I was in Saskatchewan and I was driving a tractor with my uncle. I know what it is like to combine, and I know what it is like to swath. I have been on the farm, so I have an idea of what is going on.

Members of the opposition, we do represent farmers in this country. Let us not forget that.

The other thing in regard to the first ministers meeting, I appreciate those comments that Mr. Friesen made. I think that is good. I think it is a great idea that they were satisfied at the first ministers meeting, but if everything was so good then why did those people come before our committee last month and why were some of these people who are farmers, who have farms, and who are in charge of associations almost in tears? That would be how I would answer that question. Why were they there?

● (2045)

Mr. Paul Steckle (Huron—Bruce, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know the member for British Columbia Southern Interior is not an active farmer, but I do know that he has a tremendous passion for the industry. His work in the committee is not questioned at all. I have appreciated working with him over the years he has been here and this evening he has raised some great points.

However, all of us in this country, whether we are members of Parliament or whoever we are, are consumers. I am wondering whether he has ever, from his consumer public, heard the argument made that farmers are getting too much money from government or that basically food costs have risen too high, or whether he finds sympathy with the general consumer public for the cause of farmers, and that generally the consumer believes that farmers are not getting a fair share?

They should be treated differently, better than what they are, because we all know we have to be fed. We are so dependent upon Canadian farmers and we need to do a better job of telling consumers about the products that are truly Canadian, rather than offshore products.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his compliments and also for his question.

Where I come from there is quite a movement for food security. People are coming together to work with farmers to produce food locally.

Unfortunately, for many of the small farmers in my area, beef producers, sheep producers and poultry producers, the current British Columbia cut meat regulations are impeding the farmer from slaughtering and selling to the public, so we are trying to work around that.

This is a regulation imposed by the province as a result of national standards and pressure from the WTO, so people who are working in the community are trying to work around that by building local abattoirs.

The point is that I have never heard that in my riding. There is a move even to grow wheat in the Creston Valley so that we can become more self-sufficient with this 100-mile diet, so we do not have to bring in wheat and spend all that money on transportation from the Prairies, and we can become more sufficient in the Kootenay area where I come from.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague from the NDP on his excellent speech. He, like my colleague from Malpeque and the other members of the committee, is someone with whom I enjoy working tremendously. You could feel that he spoke from the heart.

There have been a lot of quotations this evening. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister has quoted several people for us. Just before the emergency debate, I received an email from a pork producer in Alberta. He is a real producer. He comes from the Conservative Party stronghold. I would like my colleague from the NDP to comment on what this producer had to say. I will be practising my English at the same time, because this is what he says:

[English]

The present government's response is a slap in the face. The promise of some money starting to trickle to farmers in the spring time does not help us deal with devastating losses we face now. To me it is like standing on the bank of a river with a lifeline in your hand and saying to the drowning farmer, "Keep your chin up, hang in there, I'll throw you a lifeline in a few months".

[Translation]

It is quite extraordinary to hear this from a producer who comes from a Conservative Party stronghold. It is a good summary of the situation and the problems the producers are having. I would like to hear what comments my colleague who just spoke on this subject may have.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for what he had to say.

That is certainly the theme of tonight's debate. There have been promises that things would get better. Producers have been told just to wait and things would get better. But the situation is not improving. That is a fact. Farmers want help now and not just cash. They want to be entitled to loans, first of all, so that they can survive this crisis.

I think therefore that the email my colleague received reflects the mood all across Canada. I know that my colleague from Timmins—James Bay had similar discussions with his farmers and producers. I know we heard the same thing in our committee meetings and I know it is the same thing we are hearing and seeing in British Columbia, where I am from.

• (2050)

[English]

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak again tonight.

I guess as I sat here this evening it struck me again that the opposition really does not have to come up with practical solutions to the problems. The government does and we are doing that.

S. O. 52

I was struck earlier by a couple of comments made by some of the opposition parties. I think they can afford to dream in technicolor or they can afford to come up with whatever statements they want. They do not have to be practical.

I was interested to hear my colleague from the Bloc actually try to take credit for the fact that the government had brought in article 28. As the House knows, that was requested by the supply management industry some time ago.

The Liberal government would not move on that at all. It never even made a move on it. The Bloc certainly cannot take any credit for that because it was this government that made the move. As with so many other things, the Bloc members would like to engage in that hyperbole that says that they can actually do something here in Ottawa. However, as we have pointed out time and again in the House, they really do not. They cannot.

In the time that they have been here, they cannot have results. They are like the NDP members. They are consigned to perpetual opposition. As such, they are not the ones who are going to be able to bring change or bring success to the agricultural industry.

I also had to reflect on the dream that my colleague from Malpeque seemed to have had when he claimed that the Liberals had 11 programs to deal with BSE. He seemed to think that they had worked. If they had 11 programs, no one noticed 10 of them and the other one ended up funding the big companies. There was quite a conflict over that early on in the BSE crisis as well.

The Liberals cannot pretend that they have actually done anything successfully for farmers in the last decade that they were in power.

I was interested to hear the NDP critic tonight really complaining about the fact that we are trying to integrate markets. The NDP members seem to be stuck in some paradigm from 100 years ago where they think that Canada can exist without any type of trading with other markets. Clearly, if we are talking about beef and pork, those are two items in which we have to trade internationally.

I do not know if the member has not travelled to see that or what. Clearly, the NDP solution, which is not to integrate, not to trade with anyone, would bring complete and total disaster on to our agricultural markets in this country.

I hear one of the NDP members heckling me and I understand he is from an urban area. I do not know exactly what he knows about farming, but he is certainly willing to talk here. Now I notice there is a heckle from across the way from one of the urban Winnipeg ridings. I am sure we are going to hear later how important it is from the heart of Winnipeg that western Canadian farmers have no choice in marketing their grain. I will probably talk about that a little later.

However, I am really concerned about the fact that the opposition does not have to come up with practical solutions. The government does. The minister has been leading the way in finding those solutions. I will talk about that a little later.

S. O. 52

My connection to the BSE in terms of agriculture in the House goes back further than most people here. I see a couple of other members here who have been on the agriculture committee for a number of years. They will remember the call that we received in 2003 when Lyle Vanclief, the minister of agriculture at that time, called and told us that we had a BSE case in this country. All of us knew that it was going to have serious consequences for the beef industry in Canada and of course it has.

Over the last few years there has been work to try to get the borders reopened. The Liberals were unsuccessful in being able to do that, but thankfully ministers have been able to do that over the last couple of years.

Markets have opened for Canadian beef around the world. I would like to point out some of the places where we now can move our beef that we were not able to when the government came to power. Of course, we need to trade as I mentioned earlier. The markets are open in Japan, Mexico, Hong Kong, Egypt, Russia, Macau, the Philippines and the United States.

I need to point out that this was something that the Liberals completely failed to do. The Liberal critic was criticizing us earlier because we took a little time to get that border open with the United States. The Liberals took years and never did get it open. It took a change in government and the ability of the government to be able to work with the Americans on the other side of the border in order to reopen the border.

Canadian livestock producers know full well who has been working for them. They know it was not the previous government.

• (2055)

I want to talk about some of the other things that have contributed to the problems we find today in the livestock sector. I have a couple of specific things in my own riding that I would like to bring into this. They may be small things but they are things that the government has worked on and brought some successful resolution to.

The first one is the issue of gophers. For many people across this country, it is not an important thing to them, but I have an area of my riding that has been overrun by Richardson's ground squirrels. Farmers have been battling this problem for six or seven years now. They came down and tried to talk to the Liberals about it and they got nowhere. The Liberals were not interested in helping them out. These are people who find themselves on a weekend going out and shooting up to 3,500 rounds of ammunition trying to get these little animals under control on their property, and they are not able to do it. We clearly needed a better way to control the squirrels.

My colleague from Vegreville—Wainwright has worked on this issue for years. We said that we needed access to strychnine once again, and my colleague was able to show that the government had removed strychnine from the market without doing any studies about it. It just decided to take it off. This past summer, with the hard work of the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister of Health, we were able to reapply strychnine in its form on the Prairies and begin hopefully to control this problem.

The reason this is important to livestock producers is that entire quarter sections of pasture have been destroyed by these animals

through their burrowing and the fact that they were eating the grass off the land, especially in areas where there was drought. That is one small thing that this government has been able to do for producers, and we continue to work on that.

The second issue that has taken place in my part of the world is that we have had drought. There has been one particular area south and east of Swift Current, Saskatchewan where a lot of the folks have had drought for three years. They had drought in 2005, 2006 and 2007. Last year we actually did have some rain through the first half of the year and then it went to about 100° for 10 days and we had no rain for the rest of the year. A lot of the crops and the pasture disappeared in that heat.

I really wanted to do something for those producers, and the federal government and our minister at the time were willing to do that. One of the frustrations I had is that I went back to my province and I asked the government there to work with us. I said, "We have a drought situation here. We need you to work with us. We need you to recognize the problem for what it is". The province said, "No, we do not consider that there is a drought here. We are not interested in helping out the producers in that area".

I have to say that I am thankful there has finally been a change in government in Saskatchewan, and we have been able to move away from that NDP disinterest in rural Saskatchewan. The NDP had no interest at all in the rural areas. We seem to have a provincial government now that is willing to work with us and is showing new interest in rural Saskatchewan and in trying to make rural Saskatchewan work.

That has been a tremendous change, because clearly, as we know in this House but some Canadians may not realize, the NDP has completely lost touch with its roots. At one time it was a populist based party, but now it is urban based and union supported, and really it does not have that support or that connection with the rural areas. We know that people are very disheartened by the fact that the NDP has moved so far from them.

Provincially the NDP could not help us. We know that federally, the NDP is not able to help farmers either, and so the rural communities look to us for leadership and we have been providing that.

I also need to point out that we made an election commitment to improve the farm programs, and when we went to do that, we heard clearly from the provinces and from a number of farm organizations that they wanted to see a reference based margin program continue in the group of programs that we were running. We would have preferred to change that, but they were insistent that we maintain that as part of our programs. It has been fun to watch two agriculture ministers in succession here work and put together a suite of programs that are really going to work for producers.

Members of course are familiar with the agri-stability program, the agri-invest program, and the new agri-recovery program. We have been able to work with the provinces to bring them to completion and put them in place. They will be very good for farmers. I want to talk a little about some of the help that farmers have gotten through those programs and through this government. It is going to be a fairly long list. The opposition probably does not want to hear it, but again it is indicative of the great commitment this government has shown to producers.

• (2100)

We want to mention that our business programs are getting the advances out, they are getting payments out, they are getting loans out to producers. Specifically, we are beginning to deliver \$600 million to kickstart agri-invest accounts.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Wow.

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite seems to be willing to heckle me about that. I am not sure if he does not like the program or what, but \$600 million in my part of the world is a lot of money and producers are thrilled to see that beginning to roll out for them.

I should point out that \$160 million of those funds are going to hog and cattle producers. That is not an insignificant amount of money. In total, cattle and hog producers are expected to receive—and I expect a heckle from across the way when I say this as well—nearly \$1.5 billion through jointly funded business risk management programs from late 2007 through 2008. Maybe the opposition is applauding us and maybe I mistook it for a heckle, but even the opposition has to recognize that \$1.5 billion going out to this sector is a large amount of money.

The government has added an additional \$1 billion in loans available to the livestock sector through the federal advance payments program. That is a good program. We have worked quite a bit on the cash advance program. The opposition actually agreed with us on that and helped us to pass the legislation regarding those advances. Again, an additional \$1 billion will be available in loans through that program. The additional funding for the advance payments program will provide the sector with a total of up to \$2.3 billion in loans that will be available to livestock producers. A number of provinces have also stepped up and developed programs for the industry as well.

We are continuing to work with industry representatives to find ways of helping the industry position itself to be competitive in the long term and they include a lot of other efforts as well. I am going to talk more about some of those in the next few minutes.

One of the things that struck me is that the Liberal government never made good agricultural choices. That is probably because there has been such a disconnect between the Liberals and the rural areas. Earlier this evening we heard, as one of my colleagues mentioned, a love-in among the opposition parties. It seems that they have very few people from rural communities, but they are willing to slap each other on the back and say how much they care. We know they have a passion for these subjects.

I was reminded of something I said yesterday at committee which is that in hindsight the opposition members can see a gnat from 100

yards, but when it comes to accuracy they could not hit an elephant at that distance. That is really what we are talking about, their knowledge about the agricultural industry. It is disturbing they have as little knowledge as they do. We trust that they are willing to learn and we trust they are willing to listen and to try to understand.

One of the subjects that has come up a couple of times tonight and one of the places that clearly the opposition does not have a good understanding of agriculture is the Canadian Wheat Board issue. I would like to take a couple of minutes to talk about that, because this is an area where we could actually bring prosperity to the agricultural sector and the opposition seems dedicated and completely committed to making sure that does not happen.

Right now western Canadian farmers are sitting with their pool return outlooks somewhere under \$10 for the wheat they have turned over to the Canadian Wheat Board. The market in Minneapolis is approaching \$20. It seems that if the Canadian Wheat Board is saying it is only going to return \$8 or \$10 to the producers in western Canada, either it has completely failed to market the grain properly this year, which is possible and may be likely, I do not know, or it is hoarding a big chunk of farmers' money trying to keep it back so it can be delivered all at one time to make itself look good.

I would like to know what it is. Unfortunately, because the board is as secretive as it is in what it does, western Canadian farmers cannot find that out. What they do know is that the barley markets should be opened up. Sixty-two per cent of producers voted to have more marketing choice in their repertoire and the opposition is bound and determined to deny them that opportunity.

• (2105)

It is funny because the Wheat Board says it cannot offer marketing opportunity to western Canadian barley farmers, but I have to tell the opposition members this because they do not seem to understand it. It has already offered that marketing opportunity to the organic producers. Last year it tried to run an organic program where it was trying to get producers to buy into its system. It was such a complete failure that this year it turned around and said, "Well, we would like to open up the organic market. We will let the organic guys buy back their grain for only 8¢ or 10¢ and then they can sell it for whatever they want."

One of the most fascinating things that I have seen about this is how the president of the NFU has disappeared on this issue this year. He is an organic farmer. If the organic farmers in my home town are telling me the truth about what they are getting for their grain, he is making twice the money the other farmers who are held captive to the Canadian Wheat Board marketing system are getting. Organic producers have told me that they were taking bids for \$13 to \$18 for their spring wheat. They were getting in the range of \$10 for Canadian soft spring wheat and they were looking for over \$20 for their durum wheat; this at the same time that regular producers are held in a system where they are getting less than \$8 a bushel for their grain.

I find it interesting that organizations would take a position when their own presidents of the organizations would be in a different situation than what they expect the rest of the Canadian public to have to put up with.

S. O. 52

My NDP colleagues always quote the NFU because they seem to be fairly closely connected and they take their advice from them. However, they really should go back and ask them some questions about why one of their lead people would be taking a buyback of 8¢ and making \$20 a bushel on his grain while he and his fellow members in that organization expect everybody else to take less than half that for their grain. There is a lot of concern over that.

I want to move on to some other fronts and some of the other things that have been affecting the livestock and the pork trade and also some places where we see some opportunities arising from some of those things.

As I talked about earlier, we have been able to get the borders open. This government has moved on this issue and farmers have been able to thank us for getting the borders open.

We also know that our standards are higher than anyone else's in the world, particularly our neighbour across the border. We know that we have a good product.

This government has moved on bilateral agreements. That was a huge frustration for us when we were in opposition, trying to tell the Liberal government it needed to get moving on bilateral agreements because WTO may take a long time to settle. The Liberals sat there and said, "No, no. It is okay. We are not going to initiate anything. We don't have the resources for that". We sat and we sat and we sat and we had no bilateral discussions going on at all, I do not think, maybe one in 10 years, while the Americans settled about 35 of them. And we wonder why we were starting to fall behind.

Earlier tonight I heard the member for Malpeque seem to imply that it would be okay if we were to throw out aid that was actually countervailable, that maybe we should say, "Damn what happens at the borders; we are just going to go ahead and give money out". I hope he is not saying that because that would be the height of irresponsibility. The industry has told us time and time again it does not want whatever aid it gets to cause it trouble at the borders.

Clearly, we continue to work at WTO. There are several things that must be accomplished there. We need to expand market access around the world for products. We need to work to eliminate export subsidization. Thankfully, there has been agreement that that can take place. We need to drastically decrease the market distorting domestic support.

I see my time is drawing to an end and I am actually sorry about that. I would like to speak quite a bit longer on this.

Our Prime Minister has promised to restore Canada's position on the world stage. This government is delivering on that promise for Canadian farm families. We are opening new international opportunities. I am proud of the fact that our minister has been going around the world opening up markets for our producers. He has been responding to producers. We can see success in this industry because of the initiative that this government is taking.

• (2110)

Hon. Charles Hubbard (Miramichi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the member opposite. Tonight we are talking about the livestock sector and the beef and pork industries, which are under a lot of stress, but the hon. member talked about what he

called prairie gophers. He was shooting them with 3,500 rounds of ammunition. He spoke a long time about money being spent.

I have a couple of questions. He talked about bilaterals. We wonder sometimes in regard to the present government what the advantage to Canadians of the bilaterals will be with Colombia, for example, which is being pursued, or—

An hon. member: Korea.

Hon. Charles Hubbard: —or Korea.

More importantly, I will provide a couple of facts in terms of what *The Fiscal Monitor* talks about with regard to agriculture and spending by the government in that area. For the month of November, for example, in the year 2006, \$324 million was spent in that department. Last year in the month of November, \$198 million was spent, which in fact is a decline of 38.9% by the government's record.

If we take a look at the month ending from April to November in the year 2006-07, there was \$1.37 billion spent, but this year only \$903 million.

We hear a lot of talk about aid going out to farmers, but the record indicates that the money did not get there. There is a lot of talk, but maybe the hon. member can explain why there is a 35% decline in spending in the agricultural field for the months to the end of November.

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Speaker, that is another indication of the lack of understanding on the part of the Liberal opposition about what is happening on the farm.

The gopher issue is a huge issue in my riding. I know that my constituents do not appreciate being mocked, because they have to try to contain this problem. Some of them have fighting this for seven years. They fought for the first five years with no help at all from the member's government. We have at least stepped forward to try to find some solutions. We continue to work on it and on research projects in trying to find alternative ways of dealing with this issue.

I do not know if he understands the devastation that is caused on farms and ranches by these animals. They have completely wiped out quarter sections. People cannot even hay them. It is a situation in which they are short of feed and then they get hit by this as well. I wanted to make that point.

In terms of bilaterals, I do not think he should be mocking this because the Liberal government did not move on it. We think bilaterals are important. We also think the WTO is important. This is clearly a trading country. We need to be able to do that. Western Canada in particular depends on exports. We need to be able to move on those.

With regard to the money issue, I would like to point out some specifics.

On September 27, 2007, \$1 million was given to the Canadian Aquaculture Industry Alliance to help it implement an international marketing strategy.

We gave \$2.6 million to Alberta's agri-processing industry to improve operations and help it remain competitive on the world stage.

We have given funding to the Canadian Beef Export Federation to help to boost beef exports. We have given money to the Canadian Cattlemen's Association to support its project, which tries to enhance the marketplace.

I also need to point out that \$4.5 billion was spent on programming in 2006.

Another \$600 million is going to AgriInvest kickstart and \$400 million is committed to cover farmers' increased input costs.

It is not like there is no money going out. There is a lot of money going out. This government is very proud of the programs it delivers.

• (2115)

[Translation]

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to the parliamentary secretary's speech and must say that I was astonished. We have a chance to work together on the Standing Committee on Natural Resources, but I was stunned by his arrogance toward the opposition parties. All the parties here, whether the Liberals, the NDP or the Bloc, have their role to play. We were elected by constituents who had confidence in us and thought we could do a good job of representing them.

The arrogance shown by the parliamentary secretary is quite unacceptable. It is as if he were sitting in judgment over the 26,000 constituents who voted for me and telling them that they lacked common sense. A government needs a strong, vigorous opposition to help it outdo itself. It should thank us, therefore, for being a good, strong, vigorous opposition.

My question for the parliamentary secretary is the following. Could he tell us why his government is resisting the request from steer producers in Quebec and Canada to help them deal with the new SRM standard? Their request is for \$50 million to help them adapt and comply with this new standard.

[English]

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Speaker, I want to address the first issue and use the Canadian Wheat Board as an example. Sixty-two per cent of our producers voted in favour of opening up marketing choice for barley in western Canada. The opposition parties here have decided that they do not want to listen to western Canadian farmers and producers.

I do not know what I am supposed to do when I am continually told by those members that they are not going to let us represent the interests of western Canadian producers. I know the member personally and I know she would not let me tell her how to handle issues in her riding.

Those members should recognize the fact that western Canadian producers have spoken. They want marketing choice. I would invite the Bloc to join with us and support that.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was very interested in hearing the speaking notes from the Prime Minister's Office that the parliamentary secretary just read out.

S. O. 52

It is interesting to note that having a federal Conservative government in Ottawa and a provincial Conservative government in Alberta led to record low farm receipts. Alberta farmers now have the lowest farm receipts per capita in the country, so we can imagine what is going to happen in Saskatchewan now that it has a right wing government provincially as well as federally.

I was also very interested in the member's comments about urban members of Parliament. Who is the Conservative member in charge of the trade file in agriculture? It is the member of Parliament for Vancouver Kingsway, who not only represents an urban riding but has not been seen in two years because he betrayed his constituents.

We have a caviar swilling, cognac sucking, urban intellectual who has not been seen for two years in his riding now in charge of determining what positions are taken at the WTO and what positions are taken in bilaterals. That explains why there has been no response by the WTO to the new agricultural modalities and it also explains why livestock producers have not been consulted on any of the bilaterals.

I have a couple of questions for the parliamentary secretary. First, why did the government not support loan guarantees for livestock producers? Second, when pork producers have been calling for more international support for product promotion, why did they get a measly \$1.2 million last year for an industry that is worth \$2.5 billion?

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Speaker, if the member wants to look, he can see that the apparent PMO notes are written in my own handwriting.

I would like to address his issue about the Minister of International Trade, because what has struck me about our caucus, and particularly our cabinet, is the way that people are able to work together. The Minister of International Trade and the Minister of Agriculture have a great respect for each other and are able to work together on these files. I know that is something NDP members do not understand because they will never form the government of this country. They do not need to even try to understand that, because they will never have to deal with it.

That has been one of the great things about working with this group of people on this side of the House in our caucus. It is the way that we work together and the way we work together to represent the interests of western Canadians and the rest of Canada's agricultural producers.

• (2120)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Lethbridge has 30 seconds.

Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, but it takes me 30 seconds just to get to my feet.

S. O. 52

There are all kinds of things that need to be brought into play here when we are talking about cash payments and programs, but I would like my colleague to allude to some of the other things that need to be done or looked at. I think our government is doing that as far as regulation, harmonization and some of the other obstacles the hog and beef sectors are facing are concerned. I would like him to give a short response.

Mr. David Anderson: The main thing, Mr. Speaker, as far as the government is concerned, is that we have a world class agricultural industry in this country and that the regulatory system is a good system and convenient for agricultural producers to use.

I do not have a lot of time to talk about this, but we have been moving in the direction of trying to make sure that the regulatory system works for our producers. We have tried to simplify it from the complicated mess that was left for us in—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Resuming debate. The hon. member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Madawaska—Restigouche.

[*English*]

The fact that we are having an emergency debate tonight, 12 days after black Friday, only confirms that the Conservative minority has failed to respond positively to the plight of the hog and cattle industries.

I am calling the government's bluff on its so-called December aid package. If it was so helpful, why are farmers calling it a “cruel joke”? And why is the money not in their hands right now?

It is absolutely remarkable that in so many parts of the country constituencies that supported the Conservative Party have now found themselves abandoned.

If anyone criticizes the government, with their quite reasonable concerns, then doors are slammed in their faces and they are threatened with subtle retaliation by a vindictive Prime Minister.

To go back to the adjournment proceedings in *Hansard* of January 29, 2008, I asked the parliamentary secretary to explain “the absence of the federal minister in this crisis” and asked why there was not yet any “compassionate response”. He gave the PMO's stock horse manure response that all was well and that farmers were getting financial aid in the billions.

When we listen to the Conservatives talk about trotting out all the money for ground squirrels, it is quite clear that they have stopped listening to farmers.

On January 31, the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food received the pork and cattle industry representatives who calmly, professionally, and yes sadly, told the story of their catastrophic losses.

If anyone wanted an exposé of the cruel jokes the Conservatives are pulling on the farmers of Canada, I would ask them to please reference the committee *Hansard* for Thursday, January 31, 2008. It is all right there. They will read about Conservative members calling

desperate cattle farmers “wishy-washy”. Imagine people coming to Ottawa to remind the government of its promise to help them and instead being ridiculed.

I believe firmly in the independent farm. I believe that they produce good, secure, safe, quality food for Canadian families and themselves. I believe that the rural lifestyle is a worthy and honourable way of living that contributes mightily to our great nation.

Therefore, as a believer in the family farm, it breaks my heart to hear about the Conservative abandonment, but just as emotionally, it ticks me off something fierce. The Conservatives have made me and thousands of farmers righteously angry.

The agriculture committee made several positive recommendations. Numerous farm groups, provincial and federal, all over this country, have made very positive and practical solutions. These suggestions have yet to be acted upon.

Why, on Valentine's Day eve, is the massacre of Canadian agriculture being allowed to proceed?

Listening to that con job is way too much. The government is taking our farmers for granted. Farmers know they are being scammed while their neighbours are going bankrupt. This is shameful and disgusting.

The Prime Minister can go around making repeat announcements, but in the farmers' eyes he will be remembered as Canada's cruellest Prime Minister ever.

I will now read from that committee *Hansard* because it is better from an objective standpoint that we really get a feel for what went on.

The Canadian Cattlemen's Association said:

We were here two months ago, and unfortunately I think there are very few bankable results that we can report on. We'd hoped to give you a progress report; I think the progress report is pretty thin, and that's unfortunate.

The association went on to say:

—producers were expecting a lot more, and I think it has fallen far short of what was expected.

Unfortunately because of this absence of federal action, we have seen both Alberta and Ontario move out on their own.

From the Canadian Pork Council, Mr. Steven Moffet said:

I don't have to tell you guys that aside from the economic activity we're losing, these are farm families who are losing their livelihoods. There are employees who have worked on these farms who have to go looking for something else to do. This is a devastating situation, and we all know that. That is why we've asked for something to deal with the liquidity.

● (2125)

Again, the pork council stated:

Let me be clear that the December 19th response was a cruel joke to many of our producers. There were false hopes and false assumptions and false expectations that simply weren't deliverable. The dollars are there but currently not available to help us through the process

The cattlemen stated:

If somebody thinks the problem's solved and the money's flowing, they might want to come out to Saskatchewan. I could perhaps introduce them to some producers.

S. O. 52

The pork council stated further:

My response is very simple: the time to talk is over; the time to deliver is now. Talking doesn't help us anymore. The direction needs to come from the political side down. We've been working with the bureaucrats for about two to two and a half months, and I think they're very clear on our position and our understanding.

Numerous examples go on for pages and pages. Six days before Christmas farm and agriculture groups were told they would be helped. They went through the process. Two months later and there still has been no action.

We hear that all kinds of programs have been announced, but these people need something else. They need hard cash. We know how good the industry is. We know it can compete with anyone in the world. We know our families, whether they are urban or rural, very much appreciate the agricultural communities and our independent farms.

When we make this case, I wish the rhetoric would stop and the minister would start to write the cheques. We know what is needed. Farmers know what is needed. The pork council knows what is needed. The cattlemen's association knows what is needed.

The fact that the provinces have to pick the ball up for us is an embarrassing thing. We should be there front and centre. We should not be waiting and debating whether it is a long term solution. They will not be around in the long term if we do not act now.

Very kindly, I ask the government to respond, stop with the invective and the cruelty and address the situation of the pork and beef industry.

Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, some of the comments concentrate on the cashflow aspect and the financial transfer of funds to the industry. That is needed and it is happening. Some say it is not fast enough and that could be true, but it is something the government is seized with and it something we have tried to expedite as quickly as we can.

However, there is another aspect we have to consider, and I will ask the member opposite for his thoughts on this. It is not only the issue of the programs and the cash. The issue is to look at the how the hog and beef industries have been structured over the last number of years and to allow producers to be creative and to come forward with ideas on how to fix these two industries in the long term. A lot can be done.

Certainly we have to keep in mind the other aspect of it, but that is not the only thing. There has to be an end game. An industry has to be created, which is sustainable over the long period. We have to engage producers in a way that they are the creative people who can come forward with the answers.

Does the member opposite have a comment on what his party would do to allow that to happen? I know we have done a lot on this side of the House to increase research in grain production, to allow more grain to feed cattle and hogs. We are looking at harmonization and reducing the burden of regulation.

Therefore, could the member comment on some of those ideas?

• (2130)

Mr. Ken Boshcoff: Mr. Speaker, we know the answer to the immediate solution is the liquidity.

The Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food gave its response, five or six major things that should have been done already. The Ontario Federation of Agriculture had a 12-point program. The Canadian Federation of Agriculture, the Canadian Cattlemen's Association, the Canadian Pork Council, the Ontario Pork Industry Council, all these people provided us with the solutions, 60, 70, 80 days ago, as to what we should do.

We are still hearing their appeals. Reliance on current programs is the fallback that the government has used. In all fairness, I appreciate the way the question was asked, but there is an immediacy that is past urgency. People are on their knees. They are throwing the keys in. They are walking into the banks and telling them to take them. They cannot keep selling them for \$50 or \$100 less than what they for them.

People are hurting. There is not a large pork or cattle industry where I live, but it is important. People are desperate. I fail to grasp why the government will not respond with the sense of urgency and passion required. These are very reasonable people. Members would know them from the associations I mentioned. They frequently come to see us at the agriculture committee. They are on the Hill all the time. Their knees are worn out from begging.

We have to do more and we had to do it yesterday. I believe there is a future. When members ask me what my party has done, I am proud to say we have driven this agenda. We got the standing committee to make that report. We sent it to Parliament. We gave the solutions a long time ago. They should not be sitting on the minister's desk.

The government members can do one thing, and that is phone the minister right now. Ask him why he has not acted. The minister cannot hide from these people. They are hurting.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise this evening to take part in this emergency debate on the cattle industry. My remarks will focus on the beef industry.

Even in this technological age, agriculture remains the backbone of this country's economy. Our country was born when farming started. The farming sector and our farmers are facing many challenges, and not only in the beef industry. Let us be clear on that.

This industry which so desperately needs help is faced with an insensitive government that is showing absolutely no willingness to help our farmers. Worse yet, and I will get into it later, it is laughing in their face when it says it will try to give them extraordinary assistance. The Conservatives had said that farmers would be seeing help and that it would save them.

The reality is quite different. I will get into some very embarrassing tidbits about the Conservatives later on.

S. O. 52

Earlier, I said that agriculture and agricultural producers are facing numerous challenges, and have been for several years. I think everyone agrees on that. However, their income has not been increasing. There has not been much improvement since before the BSE crisis. Before the crisis, people were making good money, or at least, more than they are making now. All of the Conservatives' promises and pretty words do not put more money in farmer's pockets when they sell their livestock. It would not be truthful to pretend otherwise. Incomes have dropped by 60% to 70%. There has been no improvement since then. The Conservatives claim that the crisis is over, that everything is fine, and that they are handing out cheques to boot. However, incomes have not gone up; they have gone down, and as surely as incomes have gone down, expenses have gone up.

I will give a few examples of rising costs. There are many examples to choose from. Think of the incredible increase in the price of fuel, of diesel. The government is not doing anything to help our agricultural producers. The cost of cattle feed is rising. The cost of electricity is rising. We do not live in the south, so we have to heat our barns and buildings to make sure our animals do not have any problems. And there is so much more.

One of the worst problems Canadian agricultural producers, particularly those in my riding, are facing is foreign competition. That is probably one of the worst problems. It is hard to compete on a level playing field when people are not being treated fairly.

I heard the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board say earlier that the quality in Canada is superior to that found south of the border. If it is superior in Canada—and I agree it is—why is it that we allow meat and animals to enter Canada from elsewhere, from the south, where the quality is inferior? This means that our farmers cannot play on a level playing field. Who is allowing this? The government opposite is. They boast that the Canadian product is better, yet they allow animals of inferior quality to enter the country. Who will pay? The consumer will pay, but that is not a problem. Who will pay the price in the end? Our farmers will.

If I were a Conservative member listening here this evening, I would be embarrassed, simply because the government is spouting rhetoric.

• (2135)

The government tells farmers that it is there for them. It announces funding. It asks farmers to vote for them, telling them they will see how the government plans to help them. Yet we have seen proof of the opposite. I hope the members across the floor will be embarrassed here this evening.

I would like to give the example of a farmer in my riding, Madawaska—Restigouche. I recently had the opportunity to sit down with him. He feels he is being made a fool of. I challenge any Conservative member, minister or parliamentary secretary to tell me that they are doing anything positive.

On March 9, 2007, with great fanfare, the Prime Minister announced \$1 billion for Canadian farmers. The government's press release talked about a national agricultural income stabilization program, and I quote the Prime Minister of Canada:

Our government is taking another step forward towards replacing the Canadian Agricultural Income Stabilization Program with programming that is more predictable, bankable and better enables farmers to better respond to rising costs.

I spoke earlier about rising costs. Consider the example of that farmer in my riding: he own approximately 225 head of cattle and he recently received a cheque for \$55.04. The Conservative government should be ashamed of itself for trying to say that it wants to help farmers.

The Conservatives are boasting to farmers about the \$1 billion program they have introduced. But what are people in my riding getting? They are getting 26¢ a head. The government should be ashamed to send a cheque like that to that farmer. It is shameful to pay someone 26¢ a head.

How do you think our farmers are going to survive? The Conservatives can keep on telling us that everything is fine. The parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources even dared to say earlier that his government was proud to announce that program. I wonder whether, in his response, he will tell me that he is still just as proud of that program, when farmers with 225 head of livestock are getting 26¢—not \$26, \$260 or \$2,600, but 26¢—a head to help them get through the crisis.

As I said earlier, if I were a Conservative member, I would be ashamed to hear that tonight. I would talk to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and I would talk to the Prime Minister about the announcement he made on March 9, 2007 in Saskatoon. If the Prime Minister's announcement is not his way of thumbing his nose at our farmers, at the people who are the backbone of one of the largest economies in the country, then I do not know what it is.

I can assure you that this is just one example. Some people have decided not even to register for government programs any more, because they get absolutely nothing out of them. Filling out the paperwork costs more than the paltry cheque for \$55.04 that they get.

I am anxious to hear what the government members will ask me. When we talk about an emergency debate, it is because there is an emergency. Our farmers need help. Where is the government? Nowhere. Does the government want to take positive steps? No. It is finding excuses and not coming up with solutions for our farmers. Despite all the fine speeches and lovely promises, the government is offering no real solutions and absolutely nothing to help our farmers get through the crisis.

• (2140)

[English]

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the speech by the Liberal member and heard a lot of rhetoric. What did the member suggest in terms of solutions? He suggested more, more, more. He did not say what. He did not say how. He just said more.

We are in a very serious situation. It is caused by many things including: the increasing dollar, which brings down the price immediately, 20% or more, from what it was about a year ago; an increase in input costs, a lot of it feed cost due to the grain sector finally getting decent prices; and low market prices.

Why are market prices low other than the dollar? They are low because there are too many animals in the market and too many animals being produced, in this case particularly in North America.

Those are the three things that have caused this perfect storm that is extremely unusual and has made things so difficult for farmers to deal with. The cattlemen and hog producers we are talking about are not just people out there somewhere. They are my neighbours, my friends and my constituents.

The member calls for more, but I would like the Liberal member to say specifically what he would do. His government had 13 years to fix these problems and it did not do it. I would like to ask the member specifically, what would he do to solve this problem?

• (2145)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Mr. Speaker, first, if I understood correctly, in his question the member opposite just said there are too many animals. Does that mean—perhaps he will have the chance to respond—that he or his government would like there to be fewer farms and that farmers should give up their livelihood? Is that what that means?

That is what the Conservatives are saying: the industry must manage itself and resolve its little problems itself. He just said there are too many animals right now. That is almost like saying that some farms have to disappear. It is disgraceful to try to insinuate such things.

The Conservatives have been in power for over two years now and they are presenting a program that gives my producers 26¢ per head of cattle. That is the government's program. The government is bragging that everything is going well and that it is giving a lot. Can the government tell me this: is 26¢ per head of cattle a lot?

[*English*]

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am impressed by the energy of the member but not necessarily the details of his solutions. I have one to suggest both to the government and to the official opposition, when it chooses to take that role.

In meeting with farmers from across my region, Fraser Lake, Houston, Burns Lake and beyond, they are struggling to make ends meet. I am talking about the family farms, not the big mega corporation farms but the folks who are trying to make things connect.

The price of getting cows to market, talking about beef for a moment, is out of control. SRM costs are going from \$40 to \$80 a head and folks cannot bring cows to market and still make ends meet for the feed and cost of production.

I am curious as to the member's and government member's opinions on this. As a solution, we could at least bring in country of origin labelling for all beef brought into the country. We talk about there being too many cows on the market and too much beef on the market, yet we import enormous numbers while Canadian farmers have a hard time getting value for product.

I am wondering if the member would allow that the same regulations being imposed on Canadian farmers for safety reasons

should also be imposed on every importer of product to Canada. That is not the case at the moment and I think Canadian consumers, as well as producers, at least deserve solutions that look like this. I would like the member's opinion on these exact and particular solutions to this crisis that we are facing right now.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Mr. Speaker, I do not have much time. I thank my colleague for his question. In my opinion, generally speaking, it would be good for Canadians to know that they are buying Canadian products and, when it is a Canadian product, that they know exactly where it came from.

We do not need to keep repeating ourselves all the time in the House of Commons. My colleague from Malpeque mentioned this very clearly and presented eight recommendations earlier this evening. I believe those recommendations were presented in committee, therefore—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec has the floor.

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Vegreville—Wainwright.

I am pleased to have this opportunity to talk about the significant steps taken by our Conservative government to ensure the prosperity and sustainable development of the Canadian livestock industry.

It is not difficult for the Bloc to request an emergency debate. In any event, that is all it is capable of doing. Action has been taken by this side of the House and we are proud of the work being done right now on behalf of all Canadian producers.

Our government is guided by a fundamental principle in developing each of its agricultural programs and policies. This principle is simple but important: put farmers first. When farmers prosper, the entire agricultural community of rural Canada prospers. Our Conservative government knows full well that although there are many challenges facing the livestock industry, there are also many opportunities. It is at that level that we can say that we deliver the goods. We do not need any lessons from anyone in this House, especially not the Bloc, which is destined to never do anything for agriculture.

On the international scene, our government is working very hard, day after day, to find new markets for Canadian products and to maximize our position in our current markets. I thank my colleagues on this side of the House, as well as my industry colleagues for their excellent work in that regard. Our government realizes that access to international markets is vital to the economic success of Canadian livestock products and livestock producers.

The world knows that our livestock products and our genetics products are the best in the world. The same goes for our finished products and breeding stock. Fortunately, we are here so the world can benefit. Our government is working very hard to help these products reach international markets.

S. O. 52

We are the ones who did everything possible to protect and improve access to the American market and to other important markets for our country's livestock producers. We are actively engaged in fighting the latest bid by R-CALF to close the border, since it is important to protect our producers. We worked hard to get Canada full access to the Philippine beef market and partial access for Canadian beef exporters to the markets in Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Indonesia and Russia. Furthermore, we are working non-stop to resume beef exports to the Korean and Chinese markets.

Moreover, our government has an ambitious negotiation program for developing bilateral free trade agreements. Canada is currently negotiating free trade agreements with a number of major markets for exporting Canadian beef and pork to Korea, Latin America and the Caribbean, in particular.

● (2150)

Our objective is to maintain and improve the competitiveness of our beef and pork exporters on these markets by removing tariff barriers to the export of Canadian products.

I am pleased to point out that, in November, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food met in Brussels with his counterparts from the United States, India, Japan and the European Union. In January, our minister went to Mexico, where, at every opportunity, he tried to maximize market access for Canadian cattle producers. That is what I call good work on the part of our government. At every one of these meetings, the minister was proud and pleased to hear all the good people had to say about world renowned Canadian livestock products.

Our government knows that the promotion of animal health in Canada is a foundation for success on export markets. That principle is at the heart of our food safety, agricultural and international trade policies.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency plays a pivotal role in our country's efforts to ensure the safety of our food and the health of the animals and plants on which we rely to be sure that our food is safe. We are proud of the science-based work of the agency, which is recognized worldwide.

The agency works in cooperation with national and international authorities to prevent and limit the spread of animal diseases, and ensure that international trade policies are based on sound and current science. Science-based policies are essential to trade. We all got confirmation of that with BSE.

When the crisis hit, borders all over the world started being closed to Canadian beef, cattle and meat products, with disastrous consequences for Canadian producers. I think that even the Bloc Québécois and the NDP will agree that the actions taken by the government of the day to repair the prejudice were inadequate. Recently, however, thanks to the hard work and determination of this Conservative government, dozens of countries have now reopened their borders to Canadian beef. As I said earlier, Russia and the Philippines recently reopened their borders to Canadian beef and, more importantly for our producers, on November 19, the United States gave the green light for Canadian beef to start coming across their border again. The industry is the first to recognize that this was

the result of excellent work on the part of this Conservative government.

A highlight of this process was when Canada was officially categorized as a controlled risk country by the International Office Epizootics. This is yet another example which shows that the hard work done by the agency and by our government produces results for Canadian livestock producers across the country. That recognition is an endorsement of the measures implemented by our government to eradicate BSE in Canada. This remarkable recovery after the BSE crisis is testimony to our government's sound policies and initiatives.

Investing in science and innovation is another means used by our government to build a strong foundation for our producers, and it is a priority that was non-existent under previous governments. Through strategic investments in that sector, we are helping build a prosperous future for our producers and for the whole agricultural sector. Innovation is the key to helping producers innovate and seize new opportunities. We are there to help them.

● (2155)

[*English*]

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to the member and he went to great lengths to talk about what the Conservatives are doing in finding markets. I do not know if he heard earlier, but I did say to the House that thank goodness the previous Liberal minister had laid the groundwork or that crew over there would still be looking on the map to find the countries where they would be marketing to.

We on this side of the House do welcome new markets, but the problem today and the problem since December has not been new markets in an isolated sense. The problem is liquidity on the farm. Farmers are going broke. They are not going to be around by the time those new markets the member is talking about arrive. Do the folks on the other side not understand that? Farmers need money in their pockets to give them the liquidity to get through this tough period until prices start to improve.

Let me compare the two notes, because maybe we are crossing wires here. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture on January 29 talked about the agri-invest program and the kickstart program, which the Conservatives have announced a total of about seven times. He said in his concluding remarks, "That money is flowing toward cattle and hog sectors as we speak". My colleague said earlier that it amounts to 25¢ a head. Is that the money he is talking about, 25¢ a head?

● (2200)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the House of the 13 years of Liberal government, during which 75,000 Canadian farms were lost. That is over 25% of all Canadian farms. The Liberals should be ashamed of their performance.

This year alone, we anticipate that close to \$1.5 billion will be invested in programs. That money will be distributed to Canadian livestock producers. These are concrete measures for the current year and, more importantly, it is more than what the Liberals may have offered to Canadian producers.

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we are indebted to the member for Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière for the speech he gave during this emergency debate on the crisis in the pork and beef industries. There will probably be an election campaign soon. I intend to print the member for Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière's speech and pass it around to everyone in the agricultural sector.

For minutes that seemed to stretch into hours, he said over and over that everything is fine, everything has been fixed, all of which was much the same as what we heard from the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food. According to the member, the Conservative government has gone to great lengths to avert the crisis. So why are we having this debate tonight? That is my question for the member. Why are we having this debate? I can help him answer that question.

During committee meetings, a unanimous report was drafted. Members of his party were among those who signed the unanimous report with its six specific recommendations. Beef and pork producers told us that they were experiencing an unprecedented crisis. Perhaps the member is not aware that the dollar has gone up. That is one of the factors contributing to the hard times these producers are going through. The people who met with us in committee proposed solutions. I would like the member to talk about that during his remaining time. During his 10-minute speech, nothing he said acknowledged these problems at all.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, I hope that he will be pleased to print my speech, because on this side, we take concrete action to help Canadian livestock producers, as opposed to the Bloc Québécois, who can only talk. After 17 years of existence, it has never been able to invest one single dollar in Canadian agriculture. What a shame!

The Bloc Québécois is completely useless for agriculture and for Quebec farmers. The member can print my speech if he likes and show it to all his colleagues and his friends in agriculture. They will be able to sort it out at the next election.

[English]

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in one way, I would like to say that I am pleased to take part in this debate, but in another way I am not. I wish the need were not there to have an emergency debate on the cattle and hog industries, but the reality is the problem is there. I want to start by talking about why the problem is there. There are three or four main reasons.

First, our dollar has increased over the last year by roughly 20%, which means that prices are roughly 20% less. That in itself would cause a crisis in any industry, I would suggest.

Second, the input costs have gone up dramatically, especially feed costs, the reason being that grain prices, finally, have improved. Grain farmers are finally getting a decent price for their grain, but that causes severe problems in the livestock sector. That problem is right around the world, except that in the United States with corn as a

feedstock, they can be a lot more competitive and that causes some real competition problems.

Third, this all happens at a time when market prices are particularly low. Why are market prices low? They are low because the number of hogs and the number of cattle, particularly in North America, are simply too high. There are too many of them.

These things together have caused what many cattlemen and hog producers are calling a perfect storm. It is a very difficult situation, indeed. All of this is at a time when our farmers really do not have the opportunity to compete on an equal footing with many other countries because of unfair trade restrictions. Our government has been working hard on that, but we have not solved the problem. It will take time. In fact, it will take a lot of time to fully deal with that issue, but that certainly does add to the difficulty.

All of this is at a time when the cattle industry, for example, went through a serious drought in 2002 in western Canada causing great difficulties. Feed costs went up. There was not enough feed. In 2003 the BSE mess hit. At that time the industry already was in a lot of trouble. Here we are just a few years later, we have not even successfully dealt with the problems from 2002 and 2003, and this other problem has hit. That is the problem.

What are the solutions? I have not heard a lot of solutions from any of the other parties. I have heard some solutions from the government. I want to talk about what are not solutions to this problem. Here is what we cannot do.

We cannot make a per head payment of any kind, as some members, including the Liberal member for Malpeque, have suggested. We cannot do that for two reasons.

The first reason is that we would be breaking trade rules. What would that mean? In Alberta, for example, where over half of our production of hogs and cattle are exported, that would mean we would no longer have a market for that half of our production. What would that do to the industry right across the country? It would be devastating, indeed. We do not need solutions that are going to make the problem worse.

Even without these trade rules; let us say that we had not come to a time when we had signed the free trade agreement or the WTO or any of the other agreements that we have signed since; let us say that we are before that time. If we made a per head payment in a situation like this, where the number of animals on the farm is already too high, what would that do? That would send a signal to farmers to hang on to their hogs and cattle. That would prolong the problem. It is not a solution to the problem.

I started farming in 1974. In 1975 my neighbours and friends were in a real mess in the cattle industry, much like now. What did the government of the day do? It gave a large per head payment, and it was even larger in Quebec making the problem even worse there. The government made a large per head payment for farmers to hang on to their cattle. That was the government's solution.

S. O. 52

• (2205)

It was an unbelievably stupid solution because farmers did what these payments encouraged them to do, they held on to the cows. As a result, the number of animals on the farm were not reduced as they had to be to deal with the problem. The problem could only be dealt with by reducing the number of animals on the farm.

That per head payment destroyed the cattle industry right across this country. It took 10 years for the industry to build it back again. By 1985, we had a healthy cattle industry again and the reason is government got out of it.

We had almost free trade with our neighbour to the south, the United States, in cattle. We never had restrictions in cattle. As a result, the cattle industry blossomed and bloomed and improved, and it was a good industry. There were some ups and downs, as there always is in any agriculture sector, but it was a good industry until 2002. Then the drought hit, followed by the BSE mess.

That goes to show what can happen if we allow markets to work in as free a market environment as we can.

That is what we cannot do, and we will not do that. Hog producers and cattle producers do not want us to do that. I have been told that very clearly. So, what can we do? I would suggest there are three things that government can do, along with farmers.

The first is to make loans available, as soon as possible.

The second is to work hard and fast, and this is for a long term solution, not so much for right now, and reduce unfair trade barriers, and to increase and improve markets. We have certainly been doing that.

The third is to do some things which will help drop input prices. Now, in this case I do not think we would want to drop feed prices because it certainly is not good for the grain farmers. So, there is always a problem with that.

However, there are many other things that we can do to reduce prices, such as a deal with harmonizing regulations between Canada and the United States and so on. Our government has worked hard and done a lot to do that.

As well, we can do things like something that I personally have been working on for almost 10 years: return products to farmers or make available to farmers at as reasonable a price as possible products which will either cause them to increase production or reduce costs.

The particular example I am talking about is that which was laughed at by a colleague across the floor earlier, which is to return to farmers an effective means of controlling gophers. In this case, liquid strychnine, which they can mix with their grain on their own and effectively control these pests which in parts of the country have destroyed quarter sections of pasture land and grain land, costing farmers \$200 million to \$500 million a year.

Those are the types of things we can do and must continue to do. We certainly have done that. I want to give some specifics, though.

Here is what we have done and I think we have done all we can do within the trade restrictions when it comes to actually delivering

money to farmers. We are doing that through improved programs, for example, through an agri-invest kickstart program, benefits worth \$600 million, and \$160 million of that has gone, and will continue to go, to the cattle and hog sectors. As well, hog and cattle farmers can expect to receive about \$1.5 billion.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

• (2210)

Mr. Leon Benoit: The members across the floor are sloughing that off.

Under the trade rules that is all we can do. I want to be clear about this. Our government has done more than any other government has done before.

Second, our government has done more than any other party in this House would ever do. Why is that? The reason is we have farmers in our caucus. About a third of our caucus is made up of people who either farm now or are involved in a farm now or have been involved in a farm in a serious way in their lifetime.

So, we would expect our caucus and our government to understand agriculture and to deal with problems. That is what we are doing and that is what we are going to continue to do.

We have started to deliver the loans I talked about earlier. I know it is not fast enough. It never is. Programs are never going to solve the problem either. But we have done all we can do. We are delivering those loans as fast as we can. The provinces are working with us.

We have started the job and we are going to get the job done. We are going to get it done for farmers. We are going to get it done for Canadians. That is how we act. We are going to continue to do that.

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand (Brant, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the speech from the member opposite. He started in a fairly articulate fashion describing the perfect storm that is facing livestock producers.

He talked about some of the very difficult factors which they are facing and the very high price of grain. He talked about the high value of the Canadian dollar. He seems to have convinced himself that he realized the gravity of the problem and then he said toward the end of his remarks that his government had basically done all that it is prepared to do.

I do not know to what extent the member opposite is really informed about the very difficult situation that livestock producers, particular pork producers, are facing. I do not know whether he heard, for instance, Clare Schlegel of the Canadian Pork Council make a presentation at committee. I do not know if he has heard or read what Curtis Littlejohn of the Ontario Pork Council said about the very difficult straits in which this sector finds itself. It is in unprecedented difficult straits.

He did talk about the highs and lows. Livestock producers are at the very low point of their farming careers, the very lowest point that many of them have faced, and with which they are now having to deal. The government needs to do more on an immediate basis. I am asking the member opposite, when is more going to flow by way of loans to these producers?

S. O. 52

• (2215)

Mr. Leon Benoit: Mr. Speaker, I do appreciate the member's questions and comments, but I do want to correct him on one thing. I did not say the government had done all it can do. I said we have done or are doing all we can do. I believe that is the case.

A lot of the loan money that we are delivering as fast as we can to cattlemen and hog producers is not yet delivered. Should it have been, and could it have been delivered in December? Absolutely. But we simply could not do it. The mechanism was not in place before. We are now putting it in place and that slows the progress down. We have to get agreements with the provinces and we have them with many of the provinces. Many of the provinces have their own programs in fact, including about five of them. That helps.

I want to be clear. Have we done all we can do? No. But have we done, and what we are still doing in terms of delivering loan money, doing all we can do? I would say, yes. Except I would acknowledge that we have a lot to do in some areas.

In the area of developing markets, and this is to deal with a long term problem. It is not going to deal with a problem here—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order. I have to cut off the hon. member to accommodate another question. The hon. member for Beauharnois—Salaberry.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the speech by the member opposite.

During the testimonies about the crisis in the beef and pork sectors, the committee was told that the costs paid by Canadian producers to comply with the rules and the new regulations are higher than what the American producers have to pay. From the start, Canadian producers are therefore less competitive since they have stricter standards to comply with. It is obvious that, at this time, the government has the financial means to offer help. It has set a new standard called "specified risk materials". Why do producers have to wait before they can get some financial support in order to be able to comply with this new standard? Can the member explain why the government has to wait for so long before—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for Vegreville—Wainwright has about 40 seconds to answer.

[*English*]

Mr. Leon Benoit: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for a very good question. I agree that our government, while we have done a lot, has not done everything we can do to make the standards and the way farmers have to deal with regulation, with SRMs as an example, to make them similar in Canada to what they are in the United States.

We have done a lot and I fully acknowledge there is more to be done in that area. In the years ahead we will do a lot more in that area. These are not things that can be done overnight. We were left with a government that ignored farmers for 13 years.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Gaudet (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will share the time I have with the member for Beauharnois—Salaberry. I have the great honour to speak tonight to the crisis in the pork and cattle

industry. The pork producers have been going through a months long crisis with disturbing effects on their financial situation. The drop in pork prices combined with an increase in the price of grain is creating serious cashflow problems.

The federation asks the federal government to raise the \$1.5 million ceiling in the AgriStability and AgriInvest programs and as well to raise the ceiling of the start-up fund, which is now set at \$3 million. The federation also requests that labelling rules for Canadian products be tightened up to make sure consumers can clearly identify where products come from. It also requests that a new envelope be set up to support shared cost programs, allowing for regional flexibility in the next generation of Flexi-Farm agricultural policies. The Advance Payments Program, which has just been improved to include stock production should not use the business risk management program as a collateral since that forces producers to pay back advances when they receive a payment.

There is a huge economic impact in the agricultural sector. Farm income amounts to a total of \$6.1 billion dollars, of which 13.6% comes from pork production—\$844.9 million per year. Pork production accounts for 28,200 jobs and \$1.3 billion in value added. This industry is present in several different regions of Quebec. Pork is the leading bio-food export product in Quebec and ranks twelfth among products exported from Quebec. Pork production provides a trade surplus of \$890 million, thus producing a positive agri-food trade balance of \$289 million; without it, there would be a \$601 million deficit.

Pork production generates over \$225 million in government revenue. It is a multiplier of both jobs and government revenue, which means that 100 direct jobs create a total of 415 jobs, that \$100 in direct GDP equals \$330 in total GDP, and \$100 in total expenditures equals \$12 in government revenue.

This is an untenable situation on a day-to-day basis. At present, a very large majority of producers are having to deal with cashflow problems that threaten the very survival of their businesses. This is an exceptional situation. There are several unfavourable factors in play at the same time, such as a drop in world prices associated with surpluses on the market and a rise in input costs, a low price situation that has been going on for over 16 months and a rapid rise in the value of the Canadian dollar to a level that has not been seen in 31 years.

Federal support programs are not doing their job. On December 19, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food announced the first phase of an action plan to support Canada's livestock sector. The news release refers to the implementation of the following programs as a way to provide assistance to producers in the short term: AgriStability, with interim payments and targeted advances; AgriInvest, including the federal \$600 million Kickstart program; and a supposedly improved Advance Payments Program.

S. O. 52

The existing programs are not providing an adequate response to the needs of pork producers affected by the enormity of the present crisis. That announcement is based on already existing programs and provides no fresh money. As well, because of how Agriculture and Agri-food Canada interprets the law, implementation of the Advance Payment Program for the livestock sector in Quebec has had to be delayed. Talks are continuing, but the program is still not available for pork producers in Quebec, and so they are experiencing hardship.

The Conservatives make bad investments. In the two years they have been in power, the Conservative Party has reinvested in agriculture. Yes, that is true, but it has invested in programs that do not create jobs. It converted the CAIS program into Agri-Green. What does that change? They traded four quarters for a dollar. Where is the money? The producers do not have more money in their pockets. I

The Conservative government did not pay Quebec its fair share. For instance, in its first budget in May 2006—how could we forget?—the Conservative government promised additional assistance of \$2.2 billion over two years for the agricultural sector. Yet Quebec received only 6.8% of that particular grant. This translates into a shortfall of over \$150 million.

• (2220)

Quebec agriculture represents 18% of all Canadian farm production and 12% of the production outside supply management. Thus, Quebec should have received at least 18%.

The Pronovost commission urged the federal government to give Quebec its fair share. The UPA is constantly calling for the federal government to balance its investments in agriculture. It mentioned that again in its prebudget document from October 2006.

Over a period of more than 15 years, per capita support for agriculture has dropped by 25% in Canada, although it has grown by 75% in the European Union, by 31% in the United States and by 14% in Japan. That says it all. The Conservatives tell us they have done a lot for agriculture and that they have opened doors everywhere. So why do we have a crisis? Why is it that other countries are allowed to give more subsidies than us? If the Conservatives are such good businesspeople, they are supposed to be able to fix everything. Well here is a problem; let them fix it.

La Terre de chez nous published a letter from Jean-Guy Vincent, president of the Fédération des producteurs de porcs du Québec. I would like to read the letter.

“Producers are in an untenable situation, says Jean-Guy Vincent, president of the Fédération des producteurs de porcs du Québec, who has launched a sort of appeal at a time when many people are in crisis. The Fédération des producteurs de porcs du Québec is forming a coalition to pressure Ottawa to give producers immediate access to cash.”

“The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Laurent Lessard, had been invited to join the movement but had not responded at press time. However, his press secretary told *La terre de chez nous* that the minister had met with his federal counterpart last week and had called for speedy action to help beef and pork producers. It is expected that the two men will meet and the Minister of Agriculture will respond shortly.”

I believe that the response did not come. I am not sure, the minister might know, but I have not heard otherwise.

“In fact, the federal programs that were announced are slow in coming. For example, the federal advance payment program is not expected to be in place until early April.”

Naturally, it will be in place provided there is no election. If there is an election, the program will not be in place until August. What will our producers do from April to August? Half of them will go bankrupt.

“Many farms have already reached their credit limit. Bankers and suppliers are patient, but they are understandably nervous. “They need reassurance”, says Mr. Vincent. We are therefore calling on Ottawa to quickly set up a program to provide loan guarantees and cover the interest producers are currently paying.”

“The Fédération des producteurs de porcs du Québec estimates that the current price of pork, which is \$85 a kilogram at index 100, represents roughly half the costs of production.”

Yet, with a \$10.5 billion surplus, the government could do something for farmers. I believe that helping farmers would benefit Quebec and Canada as a whole.

“Ottawa remains silent”, laments Mr. Jean-Guy Vincent who adds that if they do not receive a reply from the federal government within three weeks, Quebec and Canadian hog producers plan to organize a demonstration on Parliament Hill. The Canadian Pork Council and its President have sent a letter to the Prime Minister calling for an immediate response to what it calls a disaster caused by the soaring dollar and input costs combined with a major decline in hog prices.

We should bear in mind that the three weeks are just about up, given that the letter is dated January 31.

The CPC is asking for loans and improvements to existing programs.

They are looking for loan guarantees that cost the government nothing. The government has money; it has \$10.6 billion.

Last December, six recommendations were made by the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food. I will read them since I do not think the government remembers them.

The first recommendation was to provide:

—a special transitional measure that will provide cash-flow in the form of interest-free loans to be paid back over a period of three to five years, and bankable cash advances to hog and cattle producers.

There is nothing extraordinary there. That is a quote from a report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food. Representatives from all parties—Conservatives, New Democrats, Liberals and Bloc members—participated. We work just as hard as the others. I believe we do our job and that we do good work as parliamentarians.

I will answer any questions.

S. O. 52

• (2225)

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I could hardly wait for you to give me the floor. I have two questions to ask my honourable colleague.

The Leader of the Opposition once said that he was not an expert in agriculture. On the other hand, the Conservative government has many farmers in its caucus. With whom does the member think the farmers are better off? Is it with a party whose leader is not an expert in agriculture and is not sure about what he should do? Or is it rather with a party whose caucus includes many farmers?

Moreover, can the member tell us what the Bloc Québécois has done for farmers in its 17 years in Parliament?

• (2230)

Mr. Roger Gaudet: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague. I will do as the Conservatives do, who thank us when we ask them questions.

The Leader of the Opposition may not know much about agriculture, but I am not sure the Secretary of State (Agriculture), who is a lawyer, knew much about it either before his appointment.

I have been around Western Canada with members who are present tonight, including the member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound. Farmers told us that the people creating the programs in the federal government could not tell a carrot from a cow. To put it simply, it is not a good idea to talk about people not being experts when one is hiring people who do not know agriculture. On the other hand, 25 years ago, everyone here was from a farm family, or had grandparents who had a farm.

What was the second question? The first question was the one that interested me. What has the Bloc Québécois done in 17 years? First —

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member.

The hon. member for Malpeque has the floor.

[English]

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a question spinning off from what the parliamentary secretary asked.

My hon. colleague was a great member on the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food. In explaining government programming on January 29, the parliamentary secretary explained the agri-invest kickstart program by saying that “money is flowing toward the cattle and hog sectors as we speak”. Does my hon. colleague from Quebec believe what the parliamentary secretary said? Has his producers seen much of that money?

The member for Madawaska—Restigouche talked earlier about his producers getting 25¢, a quarter. Do you think a quarter per cow will solve the problem in the beef and hog sector in this country? Is the money really flowing as the parliamentary secretary has said?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I am not sure if the hon. member for Malpeque was asking me or the hon. member for

Montcalm. I will assume he was asking the hon. member for Montcalm.

[Translation]

Mr. Roger Gaudet: To be honest, I will say that there is not a lot of money. I think there is more money in oil companies. There are several members here who like oil companies. Indeed, as I was saying, in its last budget, the government gave them \$902 million, but it will not take one or two billions from the surpluses to help the agricultural sector and create a concrete plan.

The hon. member asked what the Bloc Québécois has been doing for the past 17 years. Our party was elected under a democratic process. If people in my riding had not wanted me and had preferred a Conservative, they would have voted for one. But back home they do not want Conservatives. Is that clear? The Conservatives are too far to the right. Come on, asking what the Bloc is doing in the House of Commons is ridiculous.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak in this emergency debate. Frankly, if my colleagues in the House will permit me, I could perhaps continue in a better climate of silence, in a respectful climate.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: It is getting late and I was saying that I am quite proud to take part in this emergency debate. I want to commend the hon. member for Richmond—Arthabaska, the official Bloc Québécois agriculture critic, for launching this debate. He deserves a round of applause. Here we have a strong opposition party like the Bloc Québécois truly engaging in the emergency debate on agriculture.

The hon. member for Richmond—Arthabaska initiated this debate because in his riding and throughout Quebec, the pork and beef producers have expressed their needs to him and talked to him about the crisis they are currently dealing with.

All these producers, who are listening, who are probably watching us and who will read about this, need to understand who in this House is truly defending their situation and their condition.

I represent an agricultural riding and that is why I wanted to be sure to take part in this debate. On many occasions and even at my riding office, many beef and pork producers have come to me to express their worries and discouragement.

We can hide behind numbers and significant amounts of money, but there is nothing more sincere than a person, a human, a farmer or a group of farmers coming to our riding office to talk to us about their real situation, their discouragement and distress—and studies have been published on this.

S. O. 52

They are truly at the end of their rope, these men and women who live on what a farm produces, these farmers, these businessmen and businesswomen. It is a reality: a person who operates a pork or beef farm is a businessman or a businesswoman. Working hard every day only to end up in the red at the end of the month, not knowing how the loans will get paid or how to survive the following month; all that causes an extraordinary amount of tension and stress. Sometimes I get the impression that the members opposite are hiding behind their actions and are not paying enough attention to these people who are expressing their distress and discouragement.

I have a great deal of respect for producers because they are also business people who must use their creativity to innovate and make their farms profitable. Unfortunately, beef and pork producers especially are facing a desperate situation. Many farms are on the verge of ceasing operations. Earlier, I was talking to a producer in my riding, a large steer producer in Saint-Anicet, who told me that he has recorded \$200,000 in losses since the fall. If things go on as they are, he will probably have to shut down his operation before the end of summer. He will be unable to continue operating as he is without support because he will accumulate over \$600,000 in debt if he does.

When I meet with producers, they tell me that the government has announced billions of dollars and support, but for the past year and a half, none of them have seen one red cent of that money. Announcements about aid run every other week or so in local weekly and daily papers, as if old announcements are being recycled to bank political capital.

● (2235)

I do not think that producers in my riding are lying. When I meet them, they tell me that they have not yet received the money that the federal government, the Conservative government, promised. The machinery of government is slow, and the bureaucracy is ponderous. We get the sense that the system exists to serve the system, not the producers, and that is a big problem. Beef and pork producers need help now. We often forget—and this bears mentioning—that these producers operate farms and generate economic activity in nearby towns. Closing down a farm has a devastating impact on the town's economy. It affects credit unions, lenders, corner stores, mechanic shops and equipment dealers. The network of pork and beef farms is weakening, and an entire sector of economic activity is feeling the repercussions.

The Bloc wants to see farms in Quebec. We do not want to see only two or three megafarms in Quebec. We want activity and life in our villages. Farmers are important players in our communities specially since they are committed to their community. They are, for example, municipal councillors or school board members. They are generous and socially involved. Right now, their morale is so low that it has an impact on their involvement. How can they feel like giving when they are themselves in financial difficulty and do not know how they will manage to pay their bills next month? The situation is terrible in the pork as well as in the cattle industry.

I listened to the Conservative members when they said that the opposition does not propose solutions. That is totally false.

One only has to look, among other initiatives, at the various motions presented in this House by the Bloc Québécois, including

the one on supply management, which was unanimously supported by all parliamentarians, and which helped put pressure on the government to respect its commitment to protect supply management. We also did a lot of work with producers. The Bloc Québécois is in touch with producers. What we are saying here this evening, and what the member for Richmond—Arthabaska has been doing as our critic on agriculture, reflects what producers are telling him.

Everyone in this House—even Conservative members—knows that there is a crisis going on, and that we must take action.

I talked about the unanimous report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, which proposed six priorities to help the beef and pork industries. That report was produced after an extensive debate and after witnesses expressed all the needs of that sector. We wonder why some of these priorities are not implemented immediately. We have to say it: the government has the means to implement these priorities.

I invite it to be more attentive, to be proactive, to listen to the proposals made by the opposition, and to take immediate and direct action to help beef and pork producers find their way out of that crisis.

● (2240)

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her speech. In agriculture, it is never too late in the day to work, even at this late hour. Believe me, farmers often work very late.

We can see the damage left by the lack of vision from the previous Liberal government. That government was artificially kept in office with the help of the Bloc Québécois. I would simply like my dear colleague to explain to me how the whole matter ties in with the legacy left by the policies of the sovereigntist government in Quebec which was elected in 1976, 32 years ago, and had no long term vision for agriculture in Quebec. We are left with a great deal of problems, and I would like to hear my colleague comment on this.

● (2245)

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Mr. Speaker, I have no intention of giving the member opposite a history lesson, but this allows me to respond to his question and tell him that not only are pork and beef producers in the middle of a crisis, but all the problems currently related to the slaughter of steers in Quebec only add to the difficulties facing beef producers. At present, there is a processing problem. This issue also needs to be explored and a solution found, because it adds to their problems.

In my riding at this time there is a committee that is trying to reopen a slaughterhouse, the only beef slaughterhouse in Quebec. I can assure this House we are seeing some very positive things, from which my colleague opposite could draw some inspiration. It involves real teamwork that is bringing together all the elected officials of the riding and the area involved. The unions, the major players in economic development, the CLD, CFDC, reeves, mayors, MLAs and MPs are all involved. Together, we are finding solutions. The government should take note of such practices, which include listening, consulting, and taking action.

[English]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to be chair of a rural caucus that took immediate action when this crisis came up. We consistently asked questions in the House of Commons to get the government to pay attention. Our deputy leader asked questions to show how important it was, with the support of our House leader. Then our leader started a task force to examine the crisis in the hog and the beef industry. I am proud of our rural caucus, which worked so hard to deal with the farm emergencies.

The member's speech was excellent. Could she tell us exactly what the government has done since it found out about the crisis in December?

[Translation]

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

The answer is rather simple. I think the Conservative government must take its responsibilities and listen to the pork and beef producers who have submitted practical, concrete and achievable solutions. It must also listen to the opposition members who also proposed concrete, achievable solutions. The government is in possession of a unanimous report with six priorities that are concrete and achievable, especially since it has the means.

I am pushing for this in particular because there is a very important priority regarding slaughterhouses in the report, which would have the government support producers and slaughterhouses on any issues related to specified risk materials, or SRMs. It must finance this transition to make it easier to adapt and to make the market more competitive. I think it has the means. In Quebec, this assistance was estimated at \$50 million over two years. I strongly encourage all the Conservative members who come from agricultural areas to put pressure on the cabinet to immediately provide the \$50 million over two years needed to help beef producers survive the transition and implement a new standard that they themselves set.

[English]

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound.

I appreciate the fact that the member for Richmond—Arthabaska has brought this forward tonight. I get to work with him on agriculture committee. Most of the work we do is very non-partisan. We work at trying to make an impact, which will create an improvement in the conditions facing the agriculture industry.

I am a cattle producer. Members of my family are ranchers. I represent a riding that has over 2,500 ranch families. I am living this

S. O. 52

crisis. We know how bad it is. I hear from all my producers on a continuous basis about the challenges they face. They know there is no way the entire problem can be fixed by government. They know there is a lot of things that have to change in the marketplace. They know we need more access to export markets and we definitely have to see a devaluation in the Canadian dollar.

Our livestock producers, hogs and cattle producers, are the best in the world. I am proud of the product they produce and the way they produce it. They have been excellent in ensuring they have been taking a responsible approach in dealing with this crisis and suggesting ideas to government and to our agriculture committee on how to move forward.

I take exception to some of the comments that were made earlier today. The member for Malpeque, in my opinion, made some unfair comments about our Prime Minister. I have had many discussions with the Prime Minister on this crisis. He understands it all too well. A lot of people often forget that his in-laws are ranchers in Alberta. He hears from them personally about the challenges they face.

I have been hearing some really sad stories about how bad this crisis is getting. There is no question that when we see people who have been professional ranchers and cattle breeders for 40, 50 years, struggling to pay the bills, or trying to put the fuel in the tractor so they can feed their cattle, things have done to help them, and our government has started taking steps to meet those needs.

It has created a real problem. Two-thirds of my agriculture based riding is ranch based. No new farmers are interested in coming in and taking over those farms and ranches. There is no opportunity to diversify the operation. We cannot bust up this native land and turn it into crop land. There just is not any quality in it. My own farm is that way. There is only a couple of inches of topsoil and then it is all rocks, gravel and sand underneath. We cannot break up the land and do anything but raise cattle on it.

We have to look at the long term health of the industry, not just the short term crisis. Most producers realize that. They also realize we are not in this by ourselves. This is happening around the world. The U.S. market dictates world price on beef and hogs, and our competitors, whether it is Brazil, Argentina, the Europeans, Australia or New Zealand, have felt this first-hand. There is no doubt that any measure we take here is watched by them.

In the recent conversations I have had with parliamentarians from New Zealand, Australia, Chile and Mexico, they watch what steps we take. They do not have the resources to put money into their agriculture industry, but they will not hesitate to use trade action under our various trade agreements to take away any benefit we provide for our farmers.

S. O. 52

My producers do not want to see, and I do not want to see as a producer, the government put out an ad hoc cash payment into the farmers just to see it sucked away by another foreign government in the countervailing duty, or worse yet, see them take advantage of us, as we saw through the BSE crisis, and have those dollars disappear into the packing industry. We need to have a long term, viable outlook on how we move forward with an industry.

● (2250)

Just at the end of last year, the Europeans, in my opinion, made a very grave mistake, one that we unfortunately cannot rectify, moving forward with export subsidies on pork. That is definitely unfair to the rest of the world. The minister has written to the EU Commissioner of Agriculture and Rural Development expressing our concerns as a country and asking that they reconsider these export subsidies. Offloading one's problems onto the rest the world is no way to fix a problem like we are facing today. These problems have to be resolved head on, and that is not what the Europeans are doing.

There is no doubt about what we need. Some headway was made just last week on the WTO deal. For the livestock industry, cattle and pork, we have to have a successful conclusion to opening up markets, reducing export subsidies, reducing production distorting subsidies, and addressing that need. Canada was a lead in developing the last paper coming out of WTO, and it really starts the process in getting us to where we want to be in the Canadian position and in definitely helping out our export based industries.

Over 80% of producers in this country depend upon export markets. Cattle, hogs, grains and oilseeds producers export over 50% of what they produce. We have to have access to it. A recent study by the George Morris Centre, when it looked at the WTO modalities text, translated that into what it is going to be as a potential benefit to Canadian exporting producers. It is saying that commodity prices in Canada will increase \$8 billion to \$11 billion a year, which is a \$3 billion annual increase. We are not talking peanuts here. This is the type of relief we need to see in the industry. We have to have markets opened so that our producers can access those more lucrative markets and put more dollars in their pockets.

The government has also been active in market development, not just in the WTO talks, but the hon. Secretary of State for Agriculture signed a letter of intent in Spain on agri-food and agriculture. He also spent time with the France ministry to talk about opportunities in trade, and also to raise the issue of the European Union subsidies on pork, and asking them to reconsider that move.

The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food also recently met with his Mexican counterparts to discuss our strategic position as NAFTA partners, but also on moving North American beef around the world. We do have some joint concerns about the U.S. farm bill and how that distorts the marketplace as well. We do not want to see things like country of origin labelling, which would be even more detrimental to our cattle and pork industries here.

Also, members should not forget that in November the minister had discussions with his international counterparts at the Food and Agriculture Organization biannual meeting. He has also had bilateral discussions with the U.S. Acting Secretary of Agriculture, Charles Conner, in making sure that we have a firm commitment to the beef trade moving smoothly between our two borders. They talked about

the pool issues and also about the temporary meat testing measures they had put on Canadian products.

I am proud of the work that we have done in committee. Last fall we took a very serious look at all the problems facing the livestock producers. We put a lot of thought into it. Many of the members here discussed this earlier. We presented a report in the House, and the government has already acted upon some of those recommendations.

Since that time we have also had a follow-up meeting with the cattle and hog industries to talk about some of the issues. As always, as I experienced as a producer under the former Liberal government, no program is perfect, and never is it going to meet all the needs. Sometimes we have to tweak them and change them and put them into place.

The cattle industry has been in crisis since the BSE crisis in 2003. I felt that first, and I know that during the BSE crisis the amount of assistance that actually flowed through government programs from the previous government was virtually nil. In talking to ranchers across my riding, the only actual relief they saw in payments through government programs were directly related to the drought that we experienced in Manitoba in 2003, not the actual BSE crisis. Because they had to buy extra feed, they were able to trigger payments from CAIS. It had absolutely nothing to do with the depression they experienced in cattle prices.

The market is something we have to see an improvement in. There are a number of ways we can help in the short term, and the government has already started acted upon it.

● (2255)

The first one that we asked for was interest-free loans to be paid back over a period of three to five years, and to make sure that there are bankable advances to the hog and cattle producers. Like any program, we had to get those running quickly. Under the existing cash advance program, we could not do that because it only applied to grains and oilseeds.

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand (Brant, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the speech by the member opposite. He knows, of course, that this is an emergency debate, that livestock producers are looking for immediate assistance, hence the term "emergency". The phrasing "long term" is really not why we are here tonight. We are here to talk about short term, immediate relief for a sector which is in very difficult straits.

I would like to ask the member if he is hearing from his producers what I am hearing, which is that feed prices are so high that hog farmers cannot pay their feed bills, that the government, in the view of producers in my riding, is doing nothing to allow hog farmers to access loans, and that the present restrictions stop producers from getting money out of any government programs. That is what I am hearing from many in my riding.

I will ask the member opposite to comment not on long term solutions, which will be talked about another day, but on an immediate short term basis, what does the government intend to do for producers who are facing very difficult times right now?

• (2300)

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, I do not expect the member opposite to understand that as a producer, as I am, I want a long term solution. I am in this for the long run, as is every other producer in my riding. They want to know that we are here to help them out in the short term, and the government is doing that through advances, but they also want to know that we have a plan to move ahead and that we are working closely with the industry, with the associations and with the researchers to make sure that we address the problems, to make sure that we are competitive long term.

People want to know that their investment is going to be good. People also want to know that the tax dollars that are going to be thrown their way, even if they are advances that need to be paid back, are going to be put to good use.

It is irresponsible to say that we are only here on an emergency debate. I have been living this for five years. This emergency has been going on for a long time and it is time for us to start planning the long term goals to get us out of this mess. It started under the previous government and we are taking the steps to make it happen.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague from Selkirk—Interlake. In his comments, he claimed that the situation has now resulted in an income crisis in the pork and beef industries. He pointed out—as did my Bloc Québécois colleagues—that this crisis is persistent, ongoing and causing great harm to producers.

I would like to hear what my colleague from Selkirk—Interlake thinks of the comments made by the member for Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, which contradicted the reality. To hear him, you would think that everything is rosy and wonderful and that we are actually wasting our time tonight discussing a sector of the economy that is vital to Quebec and Canada.

[*English*]

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, things are difficult out there and I think most of us who are in the livestock business realize that.

Most of us also realize that government cannot have all the answers to the problems that we have. We do look for help and assistance. Government programs hopefully can be adapted, as we move into the new agri-stability program, to address some of these problems. I know that when we start moving down this road and using negative margins to determine payouts, that will be a help.

Right now with most of the farmers I know, including my family, my brother and my father, their margins are so small now it is almost impossible to generate a payment under the old CAIS program that is of any assistance. We know that as we move forward using negative margins, as we go into agri-stability, will be very beneficial and hopefully will provide some of the relief that so many of us desperately need.

S. O. 52

The path that the government has started down is going to be the way to find a solution to this problem in the long term, as well as deal with the cash flow problems that we are experiencing today.

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to stand here today to speak to this very important issue. My riding is the second largest beef riding in the country, and I know all too well the problems that are going on out there.

I come from a long line of farmers. My grandfather raised a large family. He farmed and he worked off the farm a bit, and he raised a family of 10 kids. My dad raised my four brothers, my two sisters and me. Until I came to the House in 2004, I was a full time farmer and proud of it. There are still days that I wish I were doing more of that, but there is the business at hand.

Three of my four brothers have farms and two of them still farm, Jerry and Paul. My youngest brother, Paul, is going at it. When he sold his calves this fall, I know the prices he was paid and it was a big reduction. We are quite aware of it out there. We have to work together.

The one thing that irks me about a lot of this is that sometimes partisanship gets involved way too much. A couple of my colleagues across the way have been on or still sit on the agriculture committee, a couple of members from the Bloc, and we all have one interest in common. We want to help agriculture in general, and in particular, the beef and pork sectors right now.

Just last Thursday the member for Malpeque and I sat on the other side of the House for a few minutes. It is not always crazy in this place, Mr. Speaker, as you well know. We talked about the BSE crisis. My equity took a hit of more than \$140,000 in the BSE crisis. As my colleague from Selkirk—Interlake just said, we are still suffering from the hangover of BSE. I am not here to talk about my personal problems but to point out the kinds of losses people suffered.

One of the things the member for Malpeque and I talked about last week was that during the BSE crisis when the borders were closed, the government of the day, and this is not a partisan statement, was able to fire money at BSE through ad hoc programs. I commend that government for it. I supported it at the time. We have to remember that there is a big difference between then and now.

We cannot do that now. At that time the border was closed and money was dumped in through ad hoc programs. The borders were already closed, so they could not harm us. It was a little easier. I am not in any way trying to say it is that much easier, but there is an obstacle today that was not there then.

S. O. 52

We have to come up with ways to do that. I believe the member for Selkirk—Interlake pointed out earlier that 80% of all our agricultural products produced, and certainly beef and pork are two of the big ones, are exported around the world. There are other situations affecting the pork and beef sectors right now. There is the high dollar. Grain prices are up, which is fantastic for our grains and oilseeds guys, because we all know that they had five or six years of taking it in the seat of the pants. We do not want any one sector ever to suffer because of another one. They are making money now and we have problems in another area.

We have to keep doing that and one of the ways is to try to diversify our export markets. There has been talk here tonight about throwing money at the problem. We have thrown a record amount of money at agriculture. Is it enough? No, it is not. It never will be. I will even give credit to the previous government. In the latter couple of years of its term, it started to increase spending in agriculture. We have continued that and that needs to be recognized. It is there, but we have to keep finding ways.

• (2305)

A motion asking for a review of the CFIA inspection fees was put forward in the agriculture committee last year and was unanimously supported by all members on the committee. What that basically would entail is all inspection fees for cattle, beef and livestock in general that would enter slaughterhouses. A preliminary review of the fees found that our producers were facing inspection fees at slaughterhouses and for live cattle border crossings that our American counterparts were not having to deal with.

That motion, which was supported unanimously, would go a ways toward giving the minister some kind of option. It was hoped that maybe he could address that in the same manner so that we could be on the same playing field as the United States.

Trade is the one area where we can increase markets. As I said, 80% of our products go around the world to more than 100 countries. Canada has an excellent reputation as a supplier of lean, high quality beef and pork products and we need to enlarge that market. The government has been working very hard to further advance international trade for both Canadian beef and pork.

Producers are facing some very tough times on the farm but they are demonstrating incredible resilience and perseverance, which is something for which Canadians are well known. We have federal and provincial governments working hard to offer support, some provinces more than others, but we need to deal with that. Some have the financial ability to do so but some do not.

Again, access to international markets needs to be and is an important part of economics assessed for Canada's livestock producers.

The opportunities out there to expand agriculture trade relations with many countries are enormous. The world wants our products, from genetics to breeding stock, right to the finished product, and we aim to supply that. Government needs to work in conjunction with industry, not one against the other or one by itself. The two must go work hand in hand. We are committed to doing that.

This government and the industry is working hard to get these products to the world. We have taken every opportunity to further

secure, protect and enhance access to the U.S. and other key markets for the livestock sector. We have engaged, through a friend of the court submission, to fight the latest bid by R-CALF to once again close the border.

Canada has regained full beef access to the Philippines. Partial access has been granted for Canadian beef exports to Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Indonesia and Russia. These kinds of markets do not just open up overnight. It has taken time to build these relationships. I would like to feel that I have had a part in that, as well as people before me. It is ongoing. It is never-ending. There is potential out there and we need to keep at it. Currently, we are actively seeking to resume beef exports to Korea and China.

We have an ambitious agenda for the negotiation of bilateral free trade agreements. We are currently negotiating free trade agreements with several markets for our beef exporters and pork exporters, including Korea, Colombia, Peru, Dominican Republic and the Caribbean.

We are getting closer to coming up with an agreement on a Korea free trade agreement. I also sit on the international trade committee. I find the two go hand in hand very well and I enjoy it very much. Members of the opposition, in particular the member for Burnaby—New Westminster, do everything possible to derail this. Now I do not know whether that member does not have any agriculture in his riding or just does not care. However, we all know that with these types of agreements around the world, nothing benefits more than agriculture.

• (2310)

I would ask all parties to put aside their partisanship and work toward this agreement. It is one of many options that I believe will help our beef and pork sectors.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the sincerity of the last two government speakers, the member for Selkirk—Interlake and the member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound. They came across as very sincere in their remarks, different from many of the government speakers earlier who tried to portray the government announcement as something more than it really is.

The member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound talked about markets opening up, as did the previous member, and that is all well and good and it must be done. However, the real problem right now for our hog and beef industry is a question of financial liquidity. The real question is whether they will have the wherewithal to survive from now until there is a bright light and they can at least break even mid-summer.

What is the government going to do, whether it be cash, loans or other means? I made eight suggestions earlier. Will the government move in order to accommodate this question of liquidity so farmers will have the wherewithal to survive until there are better times ahead?

S. O. 52

• (2315)

Mr. Larry Miller: Mr. Speaker, the member is right. We certainly have gone a long way toward trying to get some money out there. I am going to be honest with the member. He and I have talked about this before. That money never flows out of the department as quickly as we would all like it to flow. That is a given and it is a reality that we must work around.

Industry leaders and farm leaders with whom I have spoken, from the pork and beef sectors, have made it very clear that while they want some loans, at the same time they say that it goes against their better judgment, so to speak, because the last thing they need is more debt. I heard that said by more than one farm leader. At the same time, I think it was desperation. They were willing to take the money but it was not the best solution.

On the other side of it, we heard loud and clear that we were definitely not to do something that would hurt them trade wise because that would destroy the industry, not just harm it.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have to admit that, like my colleague from Malpeque, I found the comments of the hon. members for Selkirk—Interlake and Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound very enlightening.

They spoke openly about a situation they are familiar with and in which many hog and cattle producers find themselves. I could have listened to their comments for many more hours because they were very interesting, almost as interesting as those of my Bloc colleagues. I could have listened to them for many hours.

I would very much like the member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound to educate our Quebec Conservative members about this situation.

We listened just now to the member from Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, and his views are quite the opposite and—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound has 30 seconds for his answer.

[English]

Mr. Larry Miller: Mr. Speaker, I did not hear the comments that my hon. colleague from the Bloc was referring to or who said them.

I know things are not fine out there. There has been some help but there is no doubt that there needs to be more. As long as I am over here, I will keep doing my part. Our minister is doing his part. He knows what is going on and he is definitely dedicated to fixing the problem. I would ask all members in the House to work with him and get the job done.

• (2320)

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want thank the Chair for having allowed the emergency debate this evening recognizing the importance that it is to the country, in particular the rural areas all across the country that are going through a very difficult turmoil in relation to agriculture, particularly in the hog production and cattle industry.

Before I get too far into my remarks I would like to advise the Chair that I will be sharing my time with the member for Huron—Bruce.

I am from Nova Scotia. Most of my riding is in the Annapolis Valley and Digby county where there are a lot of pork producers and quite a few cattle producers. The time now is an hour later in the Annapolis Valley, so knowing the time that the farmers start their work in the morning I do not believe very many of them would be up to listen to my words this evening.

Unfortunately, a lot of them are just returning from work now. It will be 9:30 in their homes, their apartments or their boarding situations in Alberta having had to leave their farms in Nova Scotia to go out west to find work because their pork operations are closed. Most of them have gone under. A few of them continue to operate, culling their herds or getting rid of their herds because, as was said by the last two members and many members this evening, the cost of production does not meet the sales prices. They cannot continue in that type of atmosphere unaided.

There does not seem to be a light. There is not a light that they can afford to go to. They are heavily indebted. They have been operating for quite some time in a situation where cost does not meet revenue.

The Government of Nova Scotia has come on many occasions with some short term aid, forgivable loans and all sorts of assistance to keep them just afloat but it has not proven fruitful.

These are very entrepreneurial families. They are family operations. They are not the large farms that we would see in other parts of the country but they are very important economic generators in the Nova Scotia context. Some of them have gone into the production of weaner pigs where they raise small pigs because of the high genetic quality that we have in Nova Scotia, as we do across the country. They export to farmers in the United States who raise them and put them to market.

That was quite promising for some time but as more and more farmers in Canada get into difficulty, more and more weaner pigs go into the U.S. and that depresses the price. It is a buyer's market. Then we see protectionist measures happening in the United States. Certificate of origin labelling for some weaner pigs is the threat now. Therefore, I do not think anyone sees that as the long term solution. What the hope is that perhaps this will take them through and some of them will be able to survive.

However, I think we need to be honest with ourselves. If we are going to be a nation that can feed itself, if Atlantic Canada, which has the absolute capacity to feed itself in terms of pork and beef, is going to survive in that industry, then there needs to be some strategic thinking.

I agree with the members who spoke of the long term strategic thinking. There cannot always be ad hoc programs and the farmers should not always be on their knees. We need to have a plan.

S. O. 52

However, the best plan will not bring the industry through the crisis at this time because the situation is so dire. Many have spoken of the situations that have led us there. It is true that we have had the rising Canadian dollar, or the depressed American dollar, and an increase in the cost of feed, and we do not begrudge that to the farmers who grow wheat and corn. The increase in the ethanol industry has contributed. However, we must recognize those factors as factors that will remain in the future and we need to find a way to address that and to aid the farmers in being competitive in that situation.

We should consider seriously, if we can use our tax structure and we can use different methods within our country to encourage the production of ethanol, thereby increasing the cost of corn, for example, then could we not also consider some sort of indirect assistance?

I do not like to use the term subsidy because perhaps we are being listened to by our trading partners, but I think that is what we are talking about, a subsidy on feed, on transport and on those things. We have done it in the past for various reasons. Some of those things have been removed but we need to look at the situation that we are in now so we can look at the long term sustainability.

• (2325)

We have to recognize, as the House has done tonight, that it is an emergency in our country. The federal government has to work quickly with the provincial governments to bring us through this time. Excellent recommendations have been made by both the Senate agricultural committee and the House agricultural committee that the government can work with. These are multi-partisan recommendations.

In the Annapolis Valley there are family operations in the slaughter and meat processing business that are at huge risk right now. Larsen's has operated for a long time and hundreds of families depend on that company in the processing end and also the farmers, but now the slaughter side of the business is at a trickle.

It was always operated by the Larsen family which worked very well with the production side, with the agriculture side. When there was trouble the Larsen family itself would subsidize the farmers. It would assist them with so much money per pork to make sure the producers could be there for the long term. It was good for that business because it would have supply and it was good for the producers.

That type of arrangement is very difficult now. For one thing the Larsen family's operations have been purchased by Maple Leaf and we all know what is happening to Maple Leaf in Canada. Most of its operations are being closed down or discontinued and it is operating out of one area. That is its long term strategic plan. We are hoping that the Larsen operation will be operated independently because it is a well-recognized brand, well liked by the market and it will be able to continue.

I could say the same of Armstrong, which is operated by the Armstrong family and continues to work very well with cattle producers. It is facing the challenges everyone else is. Bowlby Quality Meats is another family operation. These pressures are on everyone.

The promise the Conservatives made to the agricultural sector has not been kept. Many producers listened to the current Prime Minister and felt there was a saviour, a saving grace, that there would be some huge changes, but they have not seen them. All they have seen is an ideological approach. They see it on the Wheat Board and they are very much afraid that on supply management the same kind of logic, the same ideology will be used at one point.

We know the Prime Minister once referred to supply management as a "socialist scheme for price fixing", exactly the same ideology that he sees in the Wheat Board. It is not for me from Atlantic Canada from Digby County to say whether or not there should be a Wheat Board. The point is that because of ideology everything is put in place to kill the Wheat Board rather than letting farmers decide. Farmers know at some point that same pressure can come on supply management in poultry and in dairy, but that would be a matter for debate on another day.

Today we are talking specifically of the pork and cattle industries. When we look at the cattle industry in Atlantic Canada, it is nowhere near what we see in western Canada. It is a very domestic industry, family operated, small farms, but hugely important. It is hugely important on the side of the dairy producers because the cull cows are part of the production they depend on; that generally is the profit out of their industry. When we see the collapse in the prices it has a huge impact on them. We see it again on the feed side.

The other thing we have done very well in our pork industry is we have great genetic breeds. When the market was going to lean pork, Canada produced the best pigs. We still do, but the market changes. The market evolves. I am not sure that right now we are ready for what is in demand in the international market, as we should be. Perhaps that would be a great area to consider in our transition.

The member opposite talked a lot about assistance or working on trade deals. We must recognize that with our principal trading partner, there are huge protectionist measures that are happening there that are not going to be alleviated tomorrow, that will continue. That is going to be very difficult.

In closing, I thank the Speaker for having recognized this as an emergency. I thank all who participated this evening. I particularly want to thank the last two speakers from the governing side who I think were quite honest and participated quite honestly in the debate. I look forward to questions.

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for West Nova for his comments, because many of them are true in terms of the significance of agriculture. I believe, as I think he does, that the sovereignty of agriculture is as important to this country as any other factor in it, whether it is our military, defence or anything else.

A nation has to be able to feed itself. Because of that, I believe we have to work, all parties, with our minister to get through a very complex issue. If it were not complex, it would have been fixed many times in the past. It would have been fixed back in the BSE crisis. It would have been fixed in some of the other crises that we have had.

Not only has our government done a lot, but we also need some help to know where to go with the next step, not only from our producers but through what my colleague might suggest. I would ask him if he has some other creative ideas or solutions, something we can look at that can take us forward for the long term also. This is not just about the short term. My producers are saying to me that they are expecting not \$50 a hog but something that will make them sustainable over a period of time.

• (2330)

Hon. Robert Thibault: Mr. Speaker, the member makes a point about going through the BSE crisis. It was a very important crisis. It was a determining point. We saw our agriculture sector, including pork producers but mostly cattle producers, suffering greatly at that time.

Right now if we look at the pork industry, for example, it has gone beyond suffering. It is into dying, where there is no way that the farms can continue. In my area, I am seeing farms going out of business. I am seeing young people, the third generation on those farms, having to go to other parts of the country to find work.

I do not regret those young women and men leaving and going to other parts of the country if they are going for fortune or adventure, but they are not going by choice. There is no chance now. They do not see a chance of their farms succeeding, farms that were built over 40 and 50 years.

I think we have to do the long term thing. Perhaps we cannot keep operating in the future exactly as we have been. To be able to do that, we must have quick measures, working with the provinces, because the solution is not the same everywhere. I think that if we look at the work of the Senate and the work of the House agriculture committee, we can find those elements. I think we can have quick response negotiations and get by those problems that we have on the transfer of money and the rapidity with which the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food can turn the money over to Canadians.

It has to happen now. The banks will not wait forever. I see families who are in debt with the loan boards in their provinces and are at risk of losing their very homes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague from West Nova on his excellent speech. All of Acadia must be very proud this evening. And so am I, even though, sadly, I have no Acadian roots.

That said, let us talk about packaging and advertising. To ensure that the packaging of our beef and pork products is more appropriate and that we can buy our own products here—I realize that there is free trade and international trade—it seems to me that it would help our producers if the packaging showed that the contents were from Quebec or Canada, instead of where the packaging itself was made. The same with advertising. Without becoming isolationists, we should at least show enough pride to say that the product in question was produced here. This way, we would be helping our producers. I would like to hear my hon. colleague on that.

Hon. Robert Thibault: Mr. Speaker, consumers must have a real choice. If they want to support the agricultural producers from their area, they must have some way of knowing if a product they see in

their local market is truly a Canadian product, a product from Nova Scotia or from Quebec. This is not necessarily the case right now. We do not always know where the products come from.

Pork producers from Nova Scotia made another observation: when we buy cattle, poultry or pork products, we should pay a premium of, let us say, 5¢, 10¢ a kilo or whatever, to establish a fund —

• (2335)

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order, please. Resuming debate, the hon. member for Huron—Bruce.

Mr. Paul Steckle (Huron—Bruce, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank all members who have attended this evening to make this debate a meaningful one. I believe we all bring a sentiment and a feeling to this debate because it is something that is very near and dear to us.

I also want to thank my colleague from Richmond—Arthabaska for having the courage to seek the approval of the House for a debate this evening.

Far too many times we have been called together on emergency debates on the issues surrounding agriculture, not only on the livestock sector, but on grains and oilseeds in the recent past. We need to find some long term solutions for an industry that we all love so dearly and also depend upon. Surely all of us as consumers know that we must have a consistent supply of food, and we know that in our country we have a consistent, constant, safe supply of food for our consuming public.

The issues have been addressed a number of times this evening. There are many reasons why we have depressed prices in the cattle industry and the pork industry.

For those who do not know, I must tell members that I come from a long line of farmers. My history in agriculture goes back many generations. I have spent almost all of my years in Ottawa on the agriculture committee and I have worked with some very fine people on both sides of the House during those years.

Most of us share a great deal of passion for what we believe is a very important industry. I have heard some very passionate statements this evening. If some of this evening's statements had some real meaning to them and we could believe them, we probably would not be here tonight.

When I heard the parliamentary secretary this evening, for whom I have a great deal of respect, speak about the way money is being delivered, I would have to think that the farmers would be pretty much involved in carrying cheques to the bank, but that is not what I am hearing.

Farmers are indeed in trouble. I could list a whole series of situations that have occurred in my community over the past number of weeks, particularly in the last couple of days. People I have known all my life, people who have farmed all their lives, are turning the key.

S. O. 52

Tonight there may be some farmers watching us. I am interested in seeing what kinds of messages we get tomorrow morning from that community of people we are representing tonight. I will be interested to see whether they will be telling us tomorrow morning, yes, they received the cheque, or no, they have not received the cheque, or they have been given notice that there is money coming.

I think our programs have failed us. However, as we talked about hearing in the 2006 election, we were told that the CAIS program was going to be abandoned, that the government would get rid of it. We did get rid of the name for some parts of it. Occasionally that name crops up again, but I see some wordsmithing being done there. Basically not a lot has changed in terms of the way money is delivered. A CAIS program in part that used to be 6% is now 3% and only 50% of the margin. It is not quite exactly what we used to know as the CAIS program, which was a very good program.

Ontario used to have a program called GRIP, or the market revenue program, as we know it. Colleagues from across the way who are from Ontario know what I am talking about. They were good programs. Those programs delivered. They were constant. They were there. Not only was government involved in the changing of those programs, but so were farmers. Farmers were very much involved in that period.

What has happened in the beef industry particularly, and to some degree also in the hog industry, is the concentration and the balkanization of ownership of the packing facilities for the animals. Not only do they own the packing facilities, but the fact is that they also own the animals going into the slaughterhouse. Basically what we have now are employed feeders of these animals. They may wear a Cargill coverall. They may wear something that reads Smithfield in some parts, although not in Ontario, of course. It might be Tyson if they are in the poultry business. If they are in the hog industry, they might have a maple leaf ensign on their coveralls.

This is where we have gone. This is where we are once we have the concentration. In Ontario we had one major beef packing plant that was sold out to a multinational, which is now the Cargill plant, and there are rumours in my part of Ontario that the plant may eventually be gone.

● (2340)

To suggest that because they have a short supply of animals going into the plant, it would cause them to raise the price, it does not work that way. They have plants in the west and they have plants in the United States, and therefore they can send a lot of the animals, which is already happening, to the United States of America.

Last week the plant in Kitchener was short 500 animals on Friday, but it did not raise the price. It did not go out looking for anymore. How can small time farmers compete with that? They just cannot compete with that.

We have those kinds of concentrations that are taking place, and ultimately, we will find an industry that is no longer farmer-controlled and owned. It will be controlled by the multinationals, as I said before.

I know that in the past, we have looked at what the packers did. We do not have to go back very far, to May 1993, and think about

the experience of BSE striking our industry. The committee did a lot of work and we did a lot of work in trying to get money to farmers.

The way that money was delivered, in hindsight, was not done in a way that was most effective because a lot of that money was clawed back by the packers, but we in turn, as a committee of the day, went after the packers because we wanted to know what was going on in that industry.

We knew what was going on, but we had to have the facts, so when we asked for these kinds of statements to be provided, there were three packing companies which would not provide the books.

Those three packing companies were found in contempt of Parliament and therefore, as a penalty for being found in contempt, we decided that we should maybe fine these people a substantial amount of money. We in committee agreed unanimously that we would come to the House the following day, which was four days before the election of 2006 was called, and ask the House for unanimous support to fine these packers.

The gentleman who is now the Minister of Agriculture met me at the corridor outside this room and told me that his members had withdrawn their support for that, and they were not going to go forward with that.

I think as people in government, we have to have the courage of our convictions to go against some of these large corporations. I also believe that if we want to go forward, we have to start thinking outside of the box. I believe food security is as important to this country as is our military security.

If we believe in a foreign policy that we should be in Afghanistan, and I believe we rightfully are there and we should stay there for awhile, we should also understand that we need food security to feed our people in this country.

We have, in this country, 10 provinces and one federal government competing as to how we can best deliver programs. If we look to the south for some direction, we find that the U.S. has one farm plan. We have to start looking at other ways.

When we are talking about looking at new ways of doing things, we have to look at possibly the federal government being responsible for Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada for the Canadian people. I really believe that and sometime in the near future we are going to have to look at those things.

I have neighbours who have resorted to driving a truck. One guy told me just a few days ago that his farm is now for sale. I could not believe it, but his farm is for sale. We have a desperate situation and that is why we are here this evening.

I trust that after we conclude our discussions this evening, we will go down in history as having been a group of politicians who gathered this evening to find and make changes for our industry because we believe it is important. I trust that all of us will forget our partisan ways and move forward in trying to do what is right for the industry because I believe it matters for all Canadians.

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Huron—Bruce for echoing some of my comments. I am also glad to hear him say that he supports our troops in Afghanistan.

I should point out too that our ridings share borders. Our ridings are next door and we have very similar ridings. We work together. We have to work together and that is a good thing.

My question is regarding the CAIS program. The member said that the CAIS program was a very good program. I guess he has had a change of heart because not very long ago, he stood beside me and criticized the CAIS program.

When this government first got elected in 2006, we did say that we wanted to get rid of the CAIS program, or at the very least make some drastic changes to it, but unfortunately, it was in conjunction with the provinces and we could not do that. Would the member agree with that statement?

Nevertheless, we have made changes there, so obviously, I would like to ask him why he has changed his support for the CAIS program, compared to what he was saying not that long ago?

• (2345)

Mr. Paul Steckle: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague, the member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound. We share borders. If we look at the bigger part of his riding, he has a few more cattle than I do in my riding. He indeed has the bulk of the cattle in Ontario when it comes to a particular riding. I have a few more hogs than the hon. member.

On the question of CAIS, there were always issues with CAIS that I did not like. The negative margin issue was one of those issues. There were many other issues, of course. The delivery was always a problem because, in Ontario, we have to go through Agricorp, as he well knows. There was always a delivery issue.

My greatest beef with these programs has always been that these programs take so long to be delivered. And again, getting rid of NISA was never something that many of us agreed to. It was one of those situations where the provinces, those that were involved in that program, decided to get out of it. The west basically got out of Agricorp earlier, in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, and that was the reason for them pulling away from that program. Those are the reasons for it.

I think we have to understand when a program is right, no matter which government brings it in, we need to support it.

[Translation]

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in the course of the debate, we have often heard that the opening of new markets in other countries, such as the Philippines or Korea, could be a solution to support or encourage producers. I find Koreans quite lucky to be able to eat Canadian beef, because at the IGA in Ormstown, I cannot buy any. I eat American beef and pork. This is the downside of free trade.

I still believe that the government would have the means to inform consumers and to help them make well-informed choices. Among other things, labels could be more efficient, informative and equitable.

S. O. 52

Does the member share the opinion that the government should be encouraged to establish quickly a system where labels would provide clearer information to consumers?

[English]

Mr. Paul Steckle: Mr. Speaker, yes, indeed, we need clear labelling indicating a product of Canada, not a product that is a substitute product from China with other dilutives added so that it can be called “product of Canada”. Apple juice concentrate from China does not constitute a Canadian product. That is an example of what I am suggesting.

I think we need clear Canadian labelling that it is grown, produced, packaged, all of those things, in Canada, giving Canadians a clear choice: if they want to buy a product from this country or from Chile.

On the question of free trade, using Korea as an example, 130,000 cars into this country and 75 cars out of this country does not constitute, to me, a fair trade with Korea. I think we have to understand that we can produce a lot of trade, but unless it produces wealth at the farm gate, it really does not achieve its ultimate goal.

• (2350)

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with my colleague from Lévis—Bellechasse. I will not take up much time because we are running against the clock.

Tonight everyone acknowledges that we have a crisis on our hands in terms of agriculture. When we look at the futures in the hog industry, as one individual said, in beef we can see a light coming, but I am not so sure it is not a train, but in terms of the markets in the pork industry, we can see a light coming and that is an improved market. We have to work toward that.

I farm. I come from Middlesex County in Ontario. It is one of the most productive areas in agriculture. Having the same background as my colleagues across the way, it is important to recognize that the significance of agriculture in this country is second to none in terms of the security of it. With that, we need to work together.

As my colleague from Huron—Bruce indicated earlier, we had a program that was working well in agriculture. Unfortunately, the Liberals decided to dissolve that program. The NISA program and the market revenue within the provinces were working well. Then we got stuck with the CAIS program, which works well for some. The problem is that is a program that is not fair. Some people get it and other farmers cannot seem to counter it.

When we indicated we would get out of it, that was a strong move and an indication by the farmers that they did not want it. What we found out, though, is that we needed the support of the provinces to get out of it. Support from the provinces to lead Canada away from that type of a program was not there. We have been able to bring in agri-invest, which is a contributory program with a \$600 million kickstart that began this year. There are good programs on the way.

S. O. 52

I want to emphasize that we cannot look at just what we have on our plate today. This is an emergency debate tonight, but it is also about sustaining an industry. When I talk to farmers, one of the things they tell me is not to bring in a program to assist them that will countervail them. As we go back to look at ad hoc financing and programs for agriculture, that is one of the issues: money is just thrown at it. My colleague from Malpeque is always on about where is the cash. Well, cash is not always the answer if it is going to countervail farmers. I know there is the theatrics of it all, but I also know he is very sincere about the agriculture industry.

We have to put our heads together and work with the minister to make sure we have a program that is going to sustain our industry for a long time. It is always easy to criticize, but we have to look back and see that it is always cyclical in agriculture. I have always said it is hard to get agriculture running on all eight cylinders.

Earlier tonight it was mentioned that during the last 13 or 14 years, 75,000 farmers have left. It is not just an issue right now. It has been an issue in the past and we need to figure out how we are going to sustain it for a long period of time. The people on my side, along with the people involved with agriculture, are about getting solutions, which is why we had this debate tonight.

I am going to cut off my speech here because I want my colleague to have a few minutes. If there is time at the end, I would be glad to take a question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The way the time slots are structured, we have to have a period for questions and comments.

I see the hon. member for Malpeque is rising.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will try to be quick because I know another member wants to ask a question. Maybe we could go over the debate by five minutes.

I ask the member to look at the record and the eight proposals I made earlier this evening. In addition, we have the proposals from the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food. He will find that none of those proposals are countervailable.

We heard earlier in the evening a lot of rhetoric, mostly from the various parliamentary secretaries, on what old Liberal programs or new Conservative programs do.

In terms of the balance in industries in crisis, under the last Liberal program, \$800 million was targeted for the grains and oilseeds industry. The parliamentary secretary talks about the kick-start program as the next best thing to sliced bread. What will it do for the hog industry? It will put out to the hog industry \$60 million.

The previous government put out \$800 million targeted at grains and oilseeds. The Conservative government is putting \$60 million out to the hog industry as a little share of that kick-start program. Does the member think that is balanced? Does he think it will deal with the crisis?

• (2355)

Mr. Bev Shipley: Mr. Speaker, I remind the member that when we got in, the money was not necessarily designated. We were the ones who delivered it.

However, the member talks about money. He says that the eight proposals are not countervailable. I suspect we would have to look at that. It may be a personal opinion, but I am not sure.

Hon. Wayne Easter: I rise on a point of order. That was a different program. The \$800 million was before that one.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very grateful that a number of members stayed until the end of this emergency debate. That shows how important this is. However, I would have liked to hear more from the government side, although toward the end we did hear a few more enlightening and interesting speeches about the crisis that is affecting pork and beef producers. I hope that the minister will hear about everything that has happened here, that he will take it into consideration, that he will take note and that he will act.

Some comments were made a little earlier this evening. I would like to know whether the member agrees with Bob Friesen, the president of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, who said recently about this crisis that the federal government needs to show some leadership now and do what needs to be done, that all the announcements made to date have been about program funding already announced and committed, and that the solutions recommended by the industry are being ignored.

Solutions have been proposed by the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food and producers themselves. Will the member promise to present them to the minister and see to it that they are implemented?

[*English*]

Mr. Bev Shipley: Mr. Speaker, to reiterate, when we talk about what will go out, the kick-start, for example, will put \$160 million into these funds, which go to the hog and cattle industry. Those funds are going out now.

Mr. Larry Miller: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Because we are running out of time, I respectfully request of the House, because the member has been here all night, that maybe we could sit for an extra five minutes if the rest of the members present would be agreeable.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Pursuant to an order made earlier this evening, we are not allowed to entertain requests for unanimous consent or those kinds of motions. However, I do appreciate the hon. member's intent.

It being midnight, I declare the motion carried.

(Motion agreed to)

• (2400)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The House stands adjourned until later this day, Thursday, at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24.

(The House adjourned at 12 a.m.)

CONTENTS

Wednesday, February 13, 2008

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS			
Vision Impaired Curling Championship		Mr. Duceppe	2999
Mr. Cannan	2995	Mr. Harper	2999
East Timor		Manufacturing and Forestry Industries	
Mr. Silva	2995	Mr. Crête	2999
Onil Arcand		Mr. Flaherty	3000
Mr. Lemay	2995	Mr. Crête	3000
Child Care		Mr. Flaherty	3000
Ms. Nash	2996	Health	
Burma		Mr. Layton	3000
Mr. Obhrai	2996	Mr. Clement	3000
St. James Literary Society		Mr. Layton	3000
Mrs. Jennings	2996	Mr. Clement	3000
Tackling Violent Crime Act		The Economy	
Mr. Kramp	2996	Mr. McCallum (Markham—Unionville)	3000
Quebec Film Festival		Mr. Flaherty	3001
Mrs. Mourani	2996	Mr. McCallum (Markham—Unionville)	3001
The Bloc Québécois		Mr. Flaherty	3001
Mr. Lebel	2996	Automotive Industry	
Diplomatic Representatives		Mr. Brison	3001
Mr. Pearson	2997	Mr. Prentice	3001
Justin Trudeau		Mr. Brison	3001
Mr. Gourde	2997	Mr. Prentice	3001
Health		Afghanistan	
Mr. Atamanenko	2997	Mr. Bachand	3001
Louis Riel Day		Mr. MacKay	3001
Mr. Simard	2997	Mr. Bachand	3002
Death Penalty		Mr. MacKay	3002
Mrs. Freeman	2998	Mrs. Barbot	3002
Liberal Party of Canada		Mr. Bernier	3002
Mr. Poilievre	2998	Mrs. Barbot	3002
		Mr. Bernier	3002
		Infrastructure	
		Mr. Zed	3002
		Mr. Cannon	3002
		Mr. Zed	3002
		Mr. Cannon	3002
		Mr. D'Amours	3003
		Mr. Cannon	3003
		Mr. D'Amours	3003
		Mr. Cannon	3003
		Political Donations	
		Mr. Kramp	3003
		Mr. Van Loan	3003
		Chalk River Nuclear Facilities	
		Ms. Wasylcia-Leis	3003
		Mr. Clement	3003
		Ms. Wasylcia-Leis	3003
		Mr. Clement	3004
		Homelessness	
		Ms. Sgro	3004

ORAL QUESTIONS

Afghanistan	
Mr. Dion	2998
Mr. Harper	2998
Mr. Dion	2998
Mr. Harper	2998
Mr. Dion	2998
Mr. Harper	2998
Mr. Ignatieff	2999
Mr. Harper	2999
Mr. Ignatieff	2999
Mr. Harper	2999
The Budget	
Mr. Duceppe	2999
Mr. Harper	2999

Mr. Flaherty	3004
Ms. Sgro	3004
Mr. Flaherty	3004
Government Programs	
Mr. Dryden	3004
Mr. Van Loan	3004
Mr. Dryden	3005
Mr. Van Loan	3005
Government contracts	
Ms. Bourgeois	3005
Mr. Cannon	3005
Ms. Faille	3005
Mr. Cannon	3005
Aboriginal Affairs	
Ms. Neville	3005
Mr. Strahl	3005
Official Languages	
Mr. Storseth	3005
Mr. Kenney	3006

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Interparliamentary Delegations	
The Speaker	3006
Privacy Commissioner	
The Speaker	3006
Government Response to Petitions	
Mr. Lukiwski	3006
Interparliamentary Delegations	
Mrs. Skelton	3006
Committees of the House	
Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities	
Mr. Allison	3006
Procedure and House Affairs	
Mr. Goodyear	3006
Status of Women	
Ms. Ratansi	3006
Canadian Multiculturalism Act	
Mr. Paquette	3006
Bill C-505. Introduction and first reading	3006
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	3007
Committees of the House	
Procedure and House Affairs	
Mr. Goodyear	3007
Motion to adopt	3007
(Motion agreed to)	3007
Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change	
Mr. Baird	3007
Motion	3007
Mr. McGuinty	3007
(Motion Agreed to)	3007
Mr. Van Loan	3007

Petitions	
National Sex Offender Registry	
Mr. Watson	3007
Visitor Visas	
Mr. Watson	3008
Canada Post	
Mr. Easter	3008
Phosphates	
Mr. André	3008
Security and Prosperity Partnership	
Ms. Wasylycia-Leis	3008
Canadian Pacific Railway	
Mr. Goodyear	3008
Pedophilia	
Mrs. Mourani	3008
Citizenship and Immigration	
Ms. Savoie	3008
Canada Student Loans	
Ms. Savoie	3009
Youth Criminal Justice Act	
Mr. Benoit	3009
Afghanistan	
Mrs. Freeman	3009
Nahanni National Park Reserve	
Mr. Marston	3009
Security and Prosperity Partnership	
Mr. Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)	3009
Museums Act	
(Bill C-42. On the Order: Government Orders)	3009
Mr. Van Loan	3009
Motion	3009
(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time, considered in committee of the whole, reported without amendment, concurred in, read the third time and passed.)	3009
Questions on the Order Paper	
Mr. Lukiwski	3009
Questions Passed as Orders for Returns	
Mr. Lukiwski	3011
Starred Questions	
Mr. Lukiwski	3012
Motions for Papers	
Mr. Lukiwski	3012
Request for Emergency Debate	
Livestock Industry	
Mr. Bellavance	3012
The Speaker	3012

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Constitution Act, 2007 (Democratic representation)	
Mr. Van Loan	3012
Bill C-22. Second reading	3012
Mr. Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)	3016
Mr. Angus	3016
Mr. Hawn	3017
Mr. Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)	3017

Mr. Van Loan.....	3019	Mr. Lauzon.....	3041
Mr. Angus.....	3019	Mrs. Thi Lac.....	3041
Mr. Lunney.....	3019	Mrs. Skelton.....	3042
Emergency Debate		Mr. Steckle.....	3042
Mr. Van Loan.....	3020	Mr. Lauzon.....	3042
Motion.....	3020	Mr. Bellavance.....	3044
(Motion agreed to).....	3020	Mr. Easter.....	3044
The Constitution Act, 2007 (Democratic Representation)		Mrs. Skelton.....	3045
Bill C-22. Second reading.....	3020	Mr. Lemay.....	3045
Mr. Alghabra.....	3020	Mr. Easter.....	3045
Mr. Hawn.....	3021	Mr. Lauzon.....	3048
Mr. Lunney.....	3021	Ms. Demers.....	3048
Mrs. Kadis.....	3022	Mr. Simard.....	3049
Mr. Paquette.....	3022	Mr. Benoit.....	3049
Amendment.....	3024	Mr. Atamanenko.....	3049
Mr. Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe).....	3024	Mr. Lauzon.....	3052
Mr. Angus.....	3025	Mr. Steckle.....	3052
Mr. Lessard.....	3025	Mr. Bellavance.....	3053
Mr. Angus.....	3026	Mr. Anderson.....	3053
Canada Labour Code		Mr. Hubbard.....	3056
(Bill C-40. On the Order: Government Orders:)	3029	Mrs. DeBellefeuille.....	3057
Mr. Van Loan.....	3029	Mr. Julian.....	3057
Motion.....	3029	Mr. Casson.....	3057
(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time, considered in committee of the whole, reported without amendment, concurred in, read the third time and passed)	3029	Mr. Boshcoff.....	3058
Constitution Act, 2007 (Democratic representation)		Mr. Casson.....	3059
Bill C-22. Second reading.....	3029	Mr. D'Amours.....	3059
Mr. Lunney.....	3029	Mr. Benoit.....	3060
Senate Appointment Consultations Act		Mr. Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley).....	3061
Bill C-20. Consideration resumed of motion.....	3030	Mr. Gourde.....	3061
(Motion agreed to and bill referred to a committee).....	3031	Mr. Easter.....	3062
PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS		Mr. Bellavance.....	3063
National Sustainable Development Act		Mr. Benoit.....	3063
Bill C-474. Second reading.....	3031	Mr. St. Amand.....	3064
Motion agreed to.....	3032	Mrs. DeBellefeuille.....	3065
(Bill read the second time and referred to a committee)	3032	Mr. Gaudet.....	3065
Canadian Environmental Protection Act		Mr. Lauzon.....	3067
Bill C-469. Second reading.....	3032	Mr. Easter.....	3067
Mr. Bezan.....	3032	Mrs. DeBellefeuille.....	3067
Mr. Scarpaleggia.....	3033	Mr. Bagnell.....	3069
Mr. Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley).....	3034	Mr. Bezan.....	3069
Mr. Bigras.....	3035	Mr. St. Amand.....	3070
Mr. Stanton.....	3037	Mr. Nadeau.....	3071
Mr. André.....	3038	Mr. Miller.....	3071
(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee).....	3038	Mr. Easter.....	3072
EMERGENCY DEBATE		Mr. Nadeau.....	3073
Livestock Industry		Mr. Thibault (West Nova).....	3073
Mr. Bellavance.....	3039	Mr. Shipley.....	3074
Motion.....	3039	Mr. Nadeau.....	3075
Mr. Easter.....	3040	Mr. Steckle.....	3075
		Mr. Miller.....	3077
		Mrs. DeBellefeuille.....	3077
		Mr. Shipley.....	3077
		Mr. Easter.....	3078
		Mr. Bellavance.....	3078
		(Motion agreed to).....	3078

MAIL  POSTE

Canada Post Corporation / Société canadienne des postes

Postage paid

Port payé

Lettermail

Poste-lettre

**1782711
Ottawa**

If undelivered, return COVER ONLY to:
Publishing and Depository Services
Public Works and Government Services Canada
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0S5

*En case de non-livraison,
retourner cette COUVERTURE SEULEMENT à :*
Les Éditions et Services de dépôt
Travaux publics et Services gouvernementaux Canada
Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0S5

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

**Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:
Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante :**
<http://www.parl.gc.ca>

The Speaker of the House hereby grants permission to reproduce this document, in whole or in part, for use in schools and for other purposes such as private study, research, criticism, review or newspaper summary. Any commercial or other use or reproduction of this publication requires the express prior written authorization of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

**Additional copies may be obtained from Publishing and Depository Services
Public Works and Government Services Canada
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0S5
Telephone: (613) 941-5995 or 1-800-635-7943
Fax: (613) 954-5779 or 1-800-565-7757
publications@pwgsc.gc.ca
<http://publications.gc.ca>**

Le Président de la Chambre des communes accorde, par la présente, l'autorisation de reproduire la totalité ou une partie de ce document à des fins éducatives et à des fins d'étude privée, de recherche, de critique, de compte rendu ou en vue d'en préparer un résumé de journal. Toute reproduction de ce document à des fins commerciales ou autres nécessite l'obtention au préalable d'une autorisation écrite du Président.

**On peut obtenir des copies supplémentaires ou la version française de cette publication en écrivant à : Les Éditions et Services de dépôt
Travaux publics et Services gouvernementaux Canada
Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0S5
Téléphone : (613) 941-5995 ou 1-800-635-7943
Télécopieur : (613) 954-5779 ou 1-800-565-7757
publications@tpsgc.gc.ca
<http://publications.gc.ca>**