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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, April 2, 2009

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, April 2, 2009

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

•(1005)

[*English*]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

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

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

HEALTH

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on Health in relation to Bill C-11, An Act to promote safety and security with respect to human pathogens and toxins.

Your committee examined the bill and has decided to report it with amendments and has ordered its reprint. I would like to thank all members of the committee for their hard work and cooperation.

* * *

HAZARDOUS PRODUCTS ACT

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-357, An Act to amend the Hazardous Products Act (noise limit for children's products).

She said: Mr. Speaker, it is a great privilege to present this bill to the House and I heartily recommend its adoption.

The intent of the bill is to lower permissible decibel levels in toys in order to save children from lifelong damage to their hearing. This issue has been brought before us on numerous occasions and it is time for government action. I am recommending this bill but if the government would like to steal the idea and put it into any upcoming legislation that would be fine with me as well.

The bill would bring Canada in line with the World Health Organization's limit of 75 decibels. The Hazardous Products Act currently allows toys with a noise level of 100 decibels. This limit was set back in 1970 and all audiologists agree that this is out of line with current standards.

Some hearing impairment is preventable and we owe it to our children to keep them safe from unnecessary hazards. Hopefully, child safety is an area where we can agree to make minority government work.

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

* * *

FIRST NATIONS VETERANS COMPENSATION ACT

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-358, An Act to provide a compensation plan for First Nations veterans comparable to the one offered to other war veterans.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House to honour our first nations veterans. The bill would ensure that first nations veterans receive comparable compensation to that received by other veterans of the Canadian armed forces. I would like to thank my friend from Nanaimo—Cowichan for seconding this.

I believe the bill is overdue and wish to extend my thanks to all veterans and hope that my colleagues in Parliament will recognize the need for this legislation. The bill, if passed, will ensure that all veterans receive benefits and compensation that properly expresses the gratitude felt by all Canadians for their sacrifices and upholds the principle of equality among all citizens by the Government of Canada.

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

* * *

CONTRAVENTIONS ACT

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-359, An Act to amend the Contraventions Act and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act (marihuana).

He said: Mr. Speaker, the war on drugs has been a complete failure. It has not reduced the crime rate, it has not reduced drug use, nor has it saved lives or money. The status quo only benefits organized crime gangs and the insurgents in faraway Afghanistan. These are the parasites that benefit from the status quo.

Routine Proceedings

This bill would decriminalize the simple possession of marijuana under 30 grams and the possession of two or fewer plants. It would sever the ties between the casual user and organized crime gangs. It would eliminate demand for their product and significantly undermine the financial underpinnings of organized crime gangs in Canada.

Possession would still be illegal but people would receive fines rather than going through the expensive judicial system. The money saved could be used to apply to the headstart program to prevent children from using drugs and to fund initiatives such as the NAOMI project, the North American opiate medication initiative.

Study after study has shown that decriminalizing marijuana is the right thing to do. Churches, police groups and others have supported it, including many studies from this House. As a physician, I have seen the ravages of drug use. The status quo only increases harm and drug use.

What I hope happens through this bill is that we can move toward a rational and mature debate on substance abuse so that people who have substance abuse problems are treated as a medical problem and organized crime gangs are treated as a judicial problem.

In medicine, we have a saying, “Do no harm”. Let us do no harm and pass this bill forthwith.

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

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations among the parties and I believe you would find consent for the following motion. I move:

That, in relation to its study of the impact of the oil sands on water basins, 12 members of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development be authorized to travel to Fort McMurray, Fort Chipewyan, Edmonton and Calgary, Alberta, from May 10 to 13, 2009, and that the necessary staff accompany the committee.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

● (1010)

JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I move:

That, in relation to its study of the state of organized crime, 12 members of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights be authorized to travel to Vancouver, British Columbia, in April and May 2009, and that the necessary staff accompany the committee.

(Motion agreed to)

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS AND NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I move:

That, in relation to its study of the socio-economic conditions on reserves and in aboriginal communities throughout Canada, 12 members of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development be authorized to travel to Maniwaki, Quebec in the spring of 2009, and that the necessary staff accompany the committee.

(Motion agreed to)

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I move:

That, in relation to its study of Canada-U.S. relations, 12 members of the Standing Committee on International Trade be authorized to travel to Washington, D.C., from April 26 to 28, 2009, and that the necessary staff accompany the committee.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

[*Translation*]

PETITIONS

WESTVILLE LANDFILL

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to present a petition signed by 5,600 people from all over, from my riding and from elsewhere in Quebec, who are asking the Government of Canada to talk to American authorities and persuade them not to pursue a planned expansion of the Westville landfill in New York State across the border from the riding of Beauharnois—Salaberry.

[*English*]

INCOME TRUSTS

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36 and as certified by the Clerk of Petitions, I am pleased to present another income trust petition from Mr. Peter Davis from my riding of Mississauga South.

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

The petitioners, therefore, call upon the Conservative government to: first, admit that the decision to tax income trusts was based on flawed methodology and incorrect assumptions, as was shown at the finance committee hearings on that matter; second, apologize those who are unfairly harmed by this broken promise; and, finally, repeal the punitive 31.5% tax on income trusts.

*Speaker's Ruling***QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER**

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

[Translation]

POINTS OF ORDER

SECOND REPORT OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE—
SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now ready to rule on the point of order raised by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons concerning the procedural admissibility of the second report of the Standing Committee on Finance tabled in the House yesterday.

I would like to thank the parliamentary secretary for raising this important matter, as well as the hon. member for Saint-Maurice—Champlain for his remarks.

[English]

The parliamentary secretary argued that the report was out of order because it was beyond the mandate of the committee as laid out in Standing Order 108. In his view, it was clear that the allocation of funds to the Library of Parliament for the Parliamentary Budget Officer was outside the mandate of the Standing Committee on Finance. He pointed out that the chair had ruled as such in the committee but that the committee had overturned the ruling. In concluding, the parliamentary secretary quoted from *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* at page 879, as follows:

Committees are entitled to report to the House only with respect to matters within their mandate. When reporting to the House, committees must indicate the authority under which the study was done, (i.e. the Standing Order or the order of reference). If the committee's report has exceeded or has been outside its order of reference, the Speaker has judged such a report, or the offending section, to be out of order.

The parliamentary secretary went on to quote from my ruling of March 14, 2008, the *Debates* on page 4181-3, concerning the proceedings in the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, as well as my ruling of March 29, 2007, in which I stressed the importance of respecting the parliamentary procedures by which we govern our deliberations.

For his part, the member for Saint-Maurice—Champlain argued that the intent of the report was to give the Parliamentary Budget Officer the funds necessary to operate effectively. Stressing the close relationship between the Parliamentary Budget Officer and the committee, he pointed out that section 79.1 of the Parliament of Canada Act states that the Parliamentary Budget Officer is mandated to serve the Standing Committee on Finance.

For the benefit of the House, I would like to briefly summarize the events surrounding the adoption of the second report in the finance committee.

On Tuesday, March 31, in the Standing Committee on Finance, the hon. member for Saint-Maurice—Champlain moved a motion

recommending an increase in the Parliamentary Budget Officer's budget and that this be reported to the House. The chair of the committee, the hon. member for Edmonton—Leduc, ruled the motion out of order because it went beyond the mandate of the committee. In his ruling, the chair cited the mandates of committees in general and those of the finance committee and of the Standing Joint Committee on the Library of Parliament in particular. The ruling was appealed, the committee overturned the ruling of the chair and then proceeded to adopt the motion which became the second report of the committee.

As the chair of the Standing Committee on Finance noted in his ruling, the mandate of standing committees is specified in Standing Order 108(2) and states in part:

[Translation]

The standing committees, shall, in addition to the powers granted to them pursuant to section (1) of this Standing Order and pursuant to Standing Order 81, be empowered to study and report on all matters relating to the mandate, management and operation of the department or departments of government which are assigned to them from time to time by the House.

●(1015)

[English]

The mandate of the Parliamentary Budget Officer is defined in section 79.1 of the Parliament of Canada Act. Although he is specifically required to provide research services for the Standing Committee on Finance, as members know, section 79.1(1) states that the Parliamentary Budget Officer is an officer of the Library of Parliament. Thus, the resources and budget of the office are provided through the estimates of the Library of Parliament and not through those of the Department of Finance.

[Translation]

Standing Order 108(4) states that the mandate of the Standing Joint Committee on the Library of Parliament includes the review of the effectiveness, management and operation of the Library of Parliament. Thus, matters pertaining to the mandate and the resources allotted to the Parliamentary Budget Officer fall within the purview of the Standing Joint Committee on the Library of Parliament.

[English]

As members will recall, the issue of a committee attempting to go beyond its mandate as defined in the Standing Orders was raised last year. In a ruling given on May 15, 2008, in the *Debates* at page 5924-25, on the admissibility of the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, I reminded the House that while committees are masters of their own proceedings, a committee cannot stray beyond its mandate.

I am sure that hon. members would agree that the work of committees is vital to the functioning of the House and of Parliament. Because of their importance, the House has taken great care to define and differentiate the responsibilities of its committees, particularly where there might at first glance appear to be overlapping jurisdictions. While it is true that the House has given its committees broad mandates and significant powers, with such power and authority comes the responsibility of committees to respect their mandates and not exceed the limits of their authority.

Government Orders

Thus, it is expected that committees will be judicious in the exercise of their mandates so as to avoid bringing disputes to the House for the Speaker to adjudicate.

As explained in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* at page 857, decisions of committee chairs may be appealed to the committee. However, as I noted in rulings on March 14, 2008 and May 15, 2008, committees that overturn procedurally sound decisions by their chairs and choose to present procedurally unacceptable reports to the House will have them declared null and void.

In this instance, while one might understand the concerns of hon. members of the finance committee, their concerns are not sufficient cause for circumventing the Standing Orders. Indeed, I find it troubling that a committee chose to proceed as it did with the knowledge that what it was doing was beyond its mandate.

[*Translation*]

The subject matter of the second report of the Standing Committee on Finance is clearly not within the mandate of that committee, as spelled out in Standing Order 108, but rather is within the mandate of the Standing Joint Committee on the Library of Parliament, and therefore, in my view, the report is out of order.

[*English*]

For this reason, I rule that the second report of the Standing Committee on Finance be deemed withdrawn and that no further proceedings may be taken in relation thereto.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order on a matter flowing from your ruling.

Mr. Speaker, as you know the Standing Orders provide for the House and its members to have a debate on the Standing Orders themselves in the first 60 sitting days of a first session of Parliament.

That is an extremely important event. As you referred in your ruling, Standing Order 108 prescribes the mandates. The only opportunity that ordinary members get to in fact deal with the evolving nature of mandates of committees is in addressing that.

It is unfortunate that in the last two Parliaments now those proceedings to have a debate on the Standing Orders have been eliminated because there was a negotiation between House leaders to trade it away for other concessions, and in the current Parliament because the House prorogued in the first session before 60 days lapsed. The Standing Orders are clear. The debate must take place in the first session of a Parliament.

I think this matter may even be a matter of privilege for hon. members who feel it is important that we have some reasonable opportunity to have input into amending the Standing Orders, which guide our actions and directions not only in the chamber but also in our committees and other duties as parliamentarians.

I wanted to raise that, Mr. Speaker, because I agree with you very strongly that the mandates of committees are there, but the envelopes have been pushed and clarifications are necessary. The only way that ordinary members of Parliament can get an opportunity to express their concerns and their views on this matter is to have the debate

prescribed in the Standing Orders, which has been denied to hon. members in the last two Parliaments.

● (1020)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Mississauga South has pointed out that the debate has not taken place. He has also pointed out, I believe correctly, why it has not taken place in this Parliament, anyway, and it was apparently eliminated, as he says, by agreement among the House leaders in the previous one which must have got some unanimous consent in the House in order to become effective.

So the hon. member, to some extent, is master of his own fate in this one because all members of the House could be here and refuse consent to dispense with this debate if they chose to do that. But I point out to him that there is another avenue open to him. He can appear before the procedure and House affairs committee and argue for changes in the Standing Orders at his whim and pleasure.

The committee, I am sure, would be delighted to see him there when it meets. I think the chairman is here. I am sure he would love to have the hon. member for Mississauga South appear and make submissions to the committee in respect of possible rule changes and indeed he would love all members to come and discuss this subject in committee. They could have a lunch.

So, I recommend that and perhaps leave the matter there for now.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the same point and in response to the hon. member for Mississauga South, I can certainly share with my hon. colleague that the government will take it under advisement, but I must point out to my hon. friend that we have weekly meetings of the House leaders and this issue has never come up for discussion or negotiation. I think his concerns are misplaced and I appreciate your ruling in the previous matter.

The Speaker: Discussions between the House leaders can resolve all kinds of issues of this kind. I know the hon. member for Mississauga South could have a chat with his House leader and maybe there will be further discussions, but we will leave it there.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

ENERGY EFFICIENCY ACT

The House resumed from April 1 consideration of the motion that Bill S-3, An Act to amend the Energy Efficiency Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to support this bill which makes a small and incremental change to the Energy Efficiency Act.

We all know that when a number of small actions are added up, the results can be enormous. They can be impressive. When all the gains in energy efficiency that we can make in Canada are added up, we discover that the most important energy resource we have is actually not under the ground, but right in our homes and communities. Energy efficiency is our forgotten resource.

Government Orders

When we take a look at its potential from a collective point of view, we see that it is our biggest energy resource. It is the cheapest and it creates the most jobs. It is integral to helping Canadians live in a low carbon future.

My disappointment with this bill and with the approach of this government is that it has not realized the full and enormous benefits of this energy efficiency solution. What we see today is a small incremental change. What we need from our federal level of government is a view of the bigger picture. A real plan to tap into the benefits of energy efficiency as a resource and to mine its future potential.

The government does pay lip service to this. Some in government have clearly read some of the documents by Ralph Torrie from the David Suzuki Foundation. They know how to use the rhetoric, but they either do not know, or they do not want to produce a real and aggressive energy efficiency plan for our country.

If we count negawatts in addition to megawatts of energy, energy efficiency should be providing 30% to 50% of our energy requirements in a low carbon future. To do this we need to start investing today.

Not only is energy efficiency a huge resource, but it is also an excellent form of economic stimulus. It reduces costs for businesses and homeowners over the long term. It is estimated to create five times the number of jobs compared to conventional energy. It is estimated that 80% of the investments made are actually spent in the local economy.

Instead of an economic stimulus plan that makes investments in our future, creates jobs and puts money into our local economy, we have a government that is looking at backyard decks as a stimulus plan. Instead of having something to show for ourselves by building up an energy efficient economy, we are going to build a bunch of backyard decks instead of energy efficient homes.

In Nova Scotia I have been privileged to work on this issue in-depth. I am a member of the Affordable Energy Coalition and a representative of low-income Nova Scotians in front of our utility board. I have worked with our power utility, with the Ecology Action Centre, with industrial operators, municipalities and consumers. Together we have agreed on a plan to start investing in energy efficiency in our province.

I will share with members of the House that Nova Scotia is poised to be a cutting-edge jurisdiction on energy efficiency. An economic analysis of our electricity system was conducted that tried to figure out the most cost-effective plan for going forward in the future. The results were very clear. The results were that our province must aggressively invest in as much energy efficiency as possible. The alternative was to build another coal plant that would add \$1 billion more in costs to electric consumers. Instead of building another 400 megawatt coal plant, the plan now is to build a power plant out of energy efficiency.

Stakeholders got together and agreed that these programs, first, have to be invested in; second, they have to be effective; and third, they need to actually work. After a long and deliberative consultation we also agreed that the best way for us to move forward was to create Canada's first third party performance-based administrator.

Unfortunately, this action has been delayed. It is very unfortunate because every wasted day means more wasted energy.

An impressive strategy for energy efficiency has been pushed by the stakeholders in Nova Scotia, but it will not go anywhere unless we see leadership from all levels of government. Now that I am an MP, I recognize the importance of speaking about this issue today in the House of Commons.

There is also an important social dimension of energy efficiency because having access to energy efficiency services for all, rich and poor, rural and urban, homeowner, tenant and business, is very important. In a future where energy costs are sure to rise, energy efficiency is a new type of social service required to provide security. It needs to become a basic right for all. It needs to be a component of a green new deal that Canadians are waiting for.

• (1025)

In Nova Scotia, stakeholders agreed that everybody needs to participate in energy efficiency programs. This includes low-income Nova Scotians, who face the highest barriers to energy efficiency.

I have worked with low-income Nova Scotians in Canada facing energy poverty. They have decisions about whether to feed their kids or heat their homes. They make decisions between heating or eating.

I worked with members of one family in particular who lost their electricity, which meant they had no heat or lights. They were very worried that children's aid would take their children. They did the right thing and went into the shelter system until they could save up enough money to pay for their power bill. Going into the shelter system meant splitting up their family. The kids were taken out of their school because they had to go to another jurisdiction where the shelter was located. Dad couch-surfed. Mom stayed with the kids. They lived in a shelter while they tried to cobble together enough money to pay for their electricity, have it reconnected, turn on the heat and have a safe home.

I have also worked with clients who have scraped together the money to pay down their electricity bills and, as a result, had no money left for food. Many people do not realize the circumstances that low-income Canadians are in when faced with having to choose between heating or eating. Some of my clients have ended up living on cat food because they have used all their money to pay their electricity bills. It is shocking to hear, but it is true that it is happening in Canada.

Government Orders

Upgrading insulation, changing light bulbs and caulking windows are really good investments, but for low-income Nova Scotians and Canadians who are barely scraping by, these investments cannot be made. We need a program in Canada that ensures that low-income Canadians can cut their bills and help the environment.

Organizations such as Green Communities Canada have been calling on the government to create a national low-income energy efficiency program, but the government has not done it. This means that some of the most vulnerable members of society are excluded. These people could be helped the most by these programs, but instead they are being left out.

Energy is a basic service that is required in Canada but we need to truly start thinking of it as a service, which means asking questions about how much heat and light we get instead of how much energy and fossil fuels we burn. People are rightfully concerned when the cost of energy increases. They think more about the rates than about the bills. What is required is the ability to give people the tools to cut their bills in a future when our electricity and heating rates will no doubt increase in price.

It is no surprise that people are concerned with rates or the per unit cost of energy. We have built a huge infrastructure with transmission lines, natural gas pipelines, and oil refineries all of which are dedicated to energy supply, but we have yet to build the infrastructure required to reduce energy demand.

We need to start living in a world where accessing energy efficiency services is as easy as accessing energy supply services; where saving energy, upgrading light bulbs and getting a home audit is as easy as filling a tank with fuel oil that efficiency displaces over time; where accessing public transit is as easy as pulling into the gas station; and where talking to an energy efficiency professional is as common as going to the convenience store.

With so much potential, we need a lot more than incremental changes to energy labelling. We need a real strategy that includes investments, a strategy that includes consistent upgrades to appliance and equipment efficiency.

A labour market strategy is needed to kickstart the energy efficiency industry in our country. There needs to be training at all levels. I have worked on these programs in Nova Scotia and we actually had to have a component in the budget for training. We are creating jobs. There are not enough people to do this really amazing work, and it is skilled work. There are thousands of people needed to do this work across Canada. With so many people losing their jobs now, it is extremely disappointing to see the total lack of vision from the government on the potential for an energy efficient economy of the future.

It is the federal government's role to look at the big picture. While the small, incremental changes in this bill are important and need to be supported, the federal government also needs to be prepared to look at the big picture and to exercise some vision and leadership in building an energy efficient economy.

• (1030)

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was very impressed with the speech of hon. member for Halifax. She has obviously thought deeply and widely about the

issue of energy efficiency. There was a lot to digest in her speech and I look forward to reading it.

There is one part that really caught my attention. It seems that we have a lose-lose situation in that the government is not paying adequate attention to energy efficiency and at the same time, it is not adequately focused on the problems of the poor.

Could the hon. member for Halifax expand a bit on this lose-lose scenario and what she would recommend to put in its stead?

Ms. Megan Leslie: Mr. Speaker, it is good to think about what these solutions or programs would look like. It is a very fair question to ask.

I had the honour of being a community stakeholder and consultant with the EnerGuide for low-income households program. The EGLIH program was introduced by a previous Liberal government. It never made it off the paper. As a community consultant, I did have a view into what the EGLIH program would look like. It works with low-income homeowners. The key thing is that we cannot have up-front costs for low-income families. People on welfare in Nova Scotia get about \$6 a day. A compact fluorescent light bulb costs about \$6. If I had to make that decision, I would not buy the CF light bulb. I would choose to eat on that day.

With the EGLIH program there was no cost to homeowners. We would go into the home, do an energy audit and work with the homeowner. We would take out the incandescent light bulb and crush it so that it could never be used again. We would put in the compact fluorescent light bulb. We would insulate the roof. We would cover the hot water tank with an insulating blanket. We would go in and make the changes without any cost to the homeowner. We would then go in for another visit to ask how things were going and ask, for example, whether or not they were remembering to put the lid on the pot when they were boiling the spaghetti because it is more energy efficient. It was a lot about education. It was a lot about transforming households.

One flaw with the EGLIH program, and this was known, was that it was only for homeowners. Nova Scotia is an exception in that the majority of low-income Nova Scotians live rurally and quite a few of them own their homes. However, for the rest of Canada, most low-income Canadians are renters. How do we deal with renters? EGLIH was considering this. Community consultations were being done to figure out a good way to offer the program to tenants. One solution was to tell landlords that if low-income people were living in their building and they planned on doing renovations, we could give them a percentage of the renovations per capita. There are solutions out there.

Government Orders

●(1035)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my colleague. The process the government goes through to arrive at these policies is a curious one to me.

She talked about being involved at the grassroots level in developing, designing and helping people with what government can and cannot do. The federal government seems to be unwilling to listen to anybody who is not part of an inner sanctum of oil producers, in general, when it comes to energy. Bills like this one that come forward are so limited in scope and nature that one wonders if the government is listening and consulting with Canadians who actually deal with these issues.

I wonder if the member could talk about the value of the government going beyond its own comfort zone, going to the ground and talking to people at the community level about the issues that matter the most. In this case it is energy efficiency which, as she mentioned, is good for the planet and the pocket.

Ms. Megan Leslie: Mr. Speaker, this is an area of interest for my colleague for Skeena—Bulkley Valley. He does great work on energy efficiency and other energy issues. He asked a good question.

I will reflect on some personal experience of mine in Nova Scotia. The most success that we in the Affordable Energy Coalition and community groups that were working on energy issues had was in working with a corporation. We were asked by Nova Scotia Power to be consultants and stakeholders in helping to design energy efficiency programs. I was involved. Large industrials and manufacturers were involved. A consumer advocate was involved. Municipalities were involved. We worked together with some experts to design the programs.

On the face of it, it does not make a lot of sense that this corporation would ask an anti-poverty group to help design the programs. They were mandated by the utility and review board to bring down their energy use and implement energy efficient measures because it would save money. This means that the electricity users and consumers would save money. They were mandated to do this work. They realized that there is a lot of expertise in our community in Nova Scotia. They brought in some folks from the eastern seaboard of the United States where they are doing amazing work on energy efficiency. They are absolute role models.

For all of us to sit in a room, to have people from the pulp and paper company sitting in a room with people from the anti-poverty organization, it worked. We came up with solutions. We designed these programs. They are being implemented in Nova Scotia and government is sitting up, paying attention, listening and realizing that this is a process that works. Perhaps it missed the boat and should have gotten on this earlier. We have a government agency, Conserve Nova Scotia, that has taken quite a few of those programs. They are the administrator right now.

We are really proud of what is happening in Nova Scotia. As I mentioned earlier, we are definitely leading the charge when it comes to low-income energy efficiency in this country.

●(1040)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is with sincere pleasure that I rise to speak to this bill, not so much for the contents of the bill, which are thin gruel in some respects, but to the actual challenge put in front of this country and the world.

Bill S-3, An Act to amend the Energy Efficiency Act, seeks to give government further powers and restrictions on certain products that Canadians use every day, such as, washers, dryers, and the like. It is a disappointment in the sense that it is such a small measure in overall goal that Canada must set for itself. Canada must take a leadership role globally.

It is a small measure with respect to the serious issue of rising energy costs. Canadians have seen those costs grow year after year, although there have been some dips along the road when energy prices have fallen. We always notice that as prices go up on the world market, prices correspondingly rise here. However, when the prices on the world market fall, the price at the pump or the electricity prices do not fall correspondingly. The overall trend continues to be bad for consumers.

The bill attempts in some small way to address what are the government's powers. The response from industry has been best described as tepid. It does not seem to be excited one way or another about this, which is usually an indication that not all that much is going on. When the government comes forward with bold and strong measures, there is often a response from industry asking for less to happen or asking for it to happen in a different way. If government comes forward with something that is lukewarm, much more subtle and non-intrusive to the industry's own plans, then we see things such as this bill, which is not much.

The response from the groups concerned with these issues specifically on the environmental side has been mildly positive, in that it is seen as a small step forward. However, the government consistently has failed to come forward with anything comprehensive. That will be the focus of my comments today, because efforts outside of any comprehensive cognitive strategy, anything that people can understand as a cohesive plan, are just efforts in the dark. They are one-offs and do not do enough to bring us to where we need to be and where I sincerely believe Canadians want to be.

It seems there might be one small glimmer of hope contained in the bill, but one has to read into it and dig into it to find whether this is a real potential. That is the possibility that the government could restrict the water usage of some appliances. For example, there are clothes washers and dishwashers that use a third, a quarter, a fifth of what the standard models use. These types of measures are needed.

Government Orders

There are cities that need to invest billions upon billions of dollars on infrastructure. There are water shortage issues in certain parts of our country. This has been a crisis in Alberta in the past. This most likely will continue to be a problem for consumers and for industry. The government should clamp down on products that are wasteful for no good reason. They do not deliver a better service to Canadians. They do not deliver at a better price. They just use more water and more energy for no good reason other than that we have had it too good for too long.

We have had so much in the way of natural resources in countries like Canada. The notion was that there would always be more. There would always be more water, more trees, more energy and that we could simply design our industries and our entire economy based on the principle of waste, based on the fundamental principle that if prices drop, we just do more, that it is okay to waste a bunch, the volumes are so great it will not be a problem.

We are starting to bump up against the natural limits of the environment, the natural limits of what our resources can actually sustain. This is happening globally. We are seeing more and more conflicts around the world on issues involving water and energy. We are still experiencing the war in Iraq, which the American administration has finally admitted was an energy war. We are seeing it happen at a national level with a government that claimed it was going to map the water basins throughout Canada and failed to do so. We consistently hear of boil water advisories in our poorer communities. We also see it at the local level, where people are struggling to find ways to use less water and energy, to turn off the tap, to turn off the lights. Folks are unaware that a lot of the products they buy are vulture electronics. They are called that because they draw power all the time.

● (1045)

With the old televisions and stereos we used to have, we would turn them on, it would take a couple of seconds for them to warm up, and then we would see the screen or hear the music. Now we hit a button and our computers, televisions, or stereos are on in an instant. The reason they are able to do that is because they are constantly drawing power from the grid, anticipating that split second when we might need to see them, use them, or have them available to us. All that power is being used over time.

When we look at the need for new power in this country, in this province of Ontario and my own province of British Columbia, all sorts of money is being spent by government and industry to create new sources of power, when the easiest way to create that new power is not to use it in the first place, to actually conserve, which fits the interests of all our voters, the people who put us here, to lower their energy bills.

The only people who have an interest in keeping more power on the grid or producing more power for our cars and vehicles are the people who produce that power, so they can make more money.

There is a strong and deep interest and we are finally starting to see it from some of the more enlightened energy companies. Investing more in energy efficiency and understanding more about the need to make a more efficient, more productive, more competitive economy is fundamentally based within questions of

energy, whether it is human energy or the energy that we typically talk about in this place, which is electricity, oil and gas, and the like.

Canadians need to know that this bill, for all its small merits, takes place within a policy vacuum of the government.

I had a term turned back on me just yesterday while meeting with some energy consultants. They mentioned the Turning the Corner plan. It had been so long since I had heard it. It had been so long since I had heard the government mention it.

The government brought out this plan in 2007, for those who will remember, and there was the promise of regulations and rules by which this plan would actually be achieved. There was the promise, and nothing was delivered.

What does industry do when there is a policy vacuum? What does industry do when there are no actual rules in place? They continue on with business as usual.

Some of the investments we are talking about, particularly in higher stakes energy, such as the oil and gas and the electricity producers, require billions of dollars to switch from one to another. I recall a meeting I had with some folks who were involved in the mining industry, both in extraction and in the refining or smelting side of operations. They were furious with the government and the previous governments.

One would assume they would be natural allies of the government. They no longer were because they had seen the government issue statement after statement about requiring energy efficiency, requiring fewer greenhouse gases in the operation, yet time and time again, industry had made those investments assuming the rules would follow and nothing followed.

They are still waiting for the Turning the Corner regulations and rules. Not one has been issued of any substance.

In the policy vacuum that has been created, we see Canada, under the Minister of the Environment and others, trying to enter the slipstream of what is happening in Washington, waiting, delaying, not setting any price on carbon, not setting any regulatory limits on what happens with pollution, waiting for the Obama administration to make the effort for them.

As we have seen just this past week, the Obama administration came out with its climate change plans, a document of some 600 pages, and the response from the Canadian government is that everything is fine with us, using measurements that will simply not coincide with what our American partners are suggesting and will do, from all prescriptions.

We are seeing in Congress, both from the House of Representatives side and the Senate side, bills coming forward that are absolutely counter to what the Conservatives have proposed. On one specific issue, how we measure greenhouse gases, which would be one of the most fundamental issues if we are trying to control greenhouse gases, the government here insists on using intensity-based targets, which nobody in the world uses. Certainly nobody who hopes to participate in a carbon market is proposing the use of those targets. It is just simply not done because it is not possible. It is apples and oranges.

Government Orders

One measures the amount of greenhouse gases going out per unit of energy or per unit of economy, which is this intensity fiction that the Conservatives promote. The other one just says, "Here is a hard cap. Here is your limit. Below it, you can trade. Above it, you have to buy". That is how the market works.

When I was recently in Washington talking with some of our congressional allies, I asked them what kinds of conversations they have had with Canada about integrating our market systems. These were the principal movers of these bills, the folks whose signatures are now going on these pieces of legislation in Washington.

● (1050)

They said their conversation me was the first one they have had with a Canadian legislator, impossible for me to believe when we have this great and glorious embassy in Washington with all sorts of staff and very bright, smart people walking around. We have an entire bank of ministers heading down to Washington every so often, yet the conversation about integrating one of the most important and fundamental markets, which will be upon us within a year, had not started, thereby not allowing Canadian industry access to one of the most important markets they need to access.

Further to that, and this speaks to the energy efficiency of this, the Americans have been talking about a low-carbon standard for fuels for some time. The initiative started out of Maine, New York, California, and Washington state, and is now being picked up by Washington, D.C. The Canadian response to this is that we hope they don't do it, because Canada produces some of the highest carbon fuels in the world. The Americans are saying they are going to put a limit on the amount of those fuels they allow into the country. They are actually putting a limit on the amount of carbon that is emitted by the fuels that American consumers and industries are meant to consume, which is produced in Canada, which is apparently the Conservative government's preoccupation on a daily basis and it has not made any efforts to understand the absolute train wreck that is coming our way if we do not react to this and start to produce fuels of a lower carbon standard.

Canada's response, to this point, is simply to say that it won't happen, that the Americans will blink and simply won't have a low-carbon fuel standard. I have news for the Conservatives. The folks who are drawing up this legislation, within the White House and on the Senate and the House of Representatives sides, have all said and have written in black and white for the Canadian government to finally see, "This is happening". This is what is on the table, and the Canadian government refuses to take any real recognition of the scope and scale of the challenge that is put before us.

It is absolutely fine for the government to give itself some more powers with respect to the efficiency of electronics and the efficiency of appliances that Canadians use on a daily basis, but it does not ban the most inefficient ones. It simply says we will allow a few more of these to come forward in a more efficient way. However, the real culprits, the ones that consume the most power, the most water, and waste the most, are still not available to the government to stop outright. Why that would be, I have no idea.

It is not as if the administration of other countries around the world have not gone down that path with no serious detriment to consumers or industry. We have seen the Europeans and Japanese go

forward on this for more than two decades, and the Australians, New Zealanders and others. The path is laid, which may be the only advantage Canada actually has at this point when it comes to dealing with climate change or energy efficiency. Because of the delay of the Conservative government and previous Liberal regimes, the path forward has been paved with respect to certain basic elements of how to make a more efficient and less polluting economy.

It is not as if Canada has to reinvent the wheel at this point. So many administrations have gone before us with sincere and genuine leadership. We see this now taking place even at the G20. Today, our Prime Minister and leaders from around the world are there.

It is actually 22 countries. They are going to have to change the name at some point, I suppose, but we will call it the G20 because all do.

At this summit with the European leaders and the American administration, in the talks about the stimulus packages that are needed, there is talk about what level, if Canada is below the 2% commitment it made six months ago in Washington at the G20. In the recovery packages that the administrations are talking about in Europe and the United States, they are talking about a green recovery. They are saying that if they are going to spend this much public money into the private markets, as the Canadian government and other governments are doing, for heaven's sake, should they not put some other public interests in place as well?

The public interest has been consistent and strong over the last number of years that we want less polluting cars, less polluting industry and greater efficiency with what we do, because Canadians do not like the idea. Where it may have been a historical reality for those who built this country that there was just such a wealth of resources that waste was not a deep consideration, it now is and Canadians concern themselves with this. It is why they recycle. It is why they attempt to do things such as carpooling and buying better electronics and equipment for their homes.

It seems to me, though, at this time, when the world is talking about putting in place a green recovery, our administration here is still seized with some ancient ideas. I cannot count how many times I have heard the so-called Minister of the Environment say that we have to choose between the environment and the economy, that we cannot threaten the economy by dealing with the environment at this point in time.

When times are good it is not time to deal with the environment, and when times are bad it is not time to deal with the environment, according to that type of thinking. The conclusion is always the same from the Conservative and Liberal leadership, that it is not time to deal with the environment.

● (1055)

The current Liberal leader, for goodness' sake, called the tar sands a national unity issue. I have heard it called many things by those who promote it and by those who decry it, but I have never heard it spoken of as a thing that bonds all Canadians together, that somehow folks sitting in Halifax, Montreal and Vancouver are on bended knee every day, praying for the health and welfare of the tar sands.

Government Orders

Of course, it is important to hone in on something that is going on, but for goodness' sake, we have to have some sort of measure of balance.

When bills moved previously through this House, spending bills from the government talking about energy efficiency, talking about the need to do better on climate change, the first one that came forward was a bus transit pass allotment. The government put in place the idea of making it easier for folks to get on transit. All the transit authorities across Canada said it was a wonderful idea but to give them more buses because they knew their users, they knew the people who use transit, and what they needed was greater efficiency and greater allowance onto the transit system, that this was the problem.

The government said, no, it was not going to listen to that advice. It was going to go its own way and offer people a tax break so that they could submit their monthly transit receipt and get money back on their taxes.

There is not a problem the government sees that cannot be solved by a tax credit of some kind or another. Lo and behold, that type of neo-conservative economic policy has put us into a certain situation and it still will not be reconsidered by the government, for reasons that are beyond me.

We said not to do this because it would not actually solve the problem the government was going after. It would not get more people onto transit. It would only affect early adopters, the people who are already use transit. As well, the amount of greenhouse reductions would come at an exorbitant price. It would be very expensive per tonne reduced, per car removed from the road.

The Auditor General unfortunately proved us right. That program ended up costing Canada between \$5,000 and \$6,000 a tonne. It is impossible to imagine that the government has the capacity and the intelligence within it to actually achieve any of the targets that it proposes. It puts out things like this bus transit pass that, if we actually ran the numbers at \$5,000 or \$6,000 a tonne, would make it impossible for Canada to achieve its goals under the current government's thinking.

A second bill that came forward is absolutely mystifying to me. The government brought forward a biofuels initiative about 18 months ago. We gave it a good look and allowed it to go to committee. At the committee stage, we moved two amendments. This was some \$2 billion, a significant chunk of taxpayer money, going towards biofuels. We said that if we were going to subsidize biofuels—the ethanols, the corn ethanols, and the fuels of the world, maybe sugar or beet, we did not know what—there must be two filters applied over top.

One would be how many jobs we could possibly create with the expenditure of \$2 billion. That should be a factor. At that time, we were not in a recession, but certainly there were some very shaky elements of our economy that we saw, the government ignored, and we all landed in. We said to at least put in a job component, a metric that says how many jobs we will create for the \$2 billion invested. The government said, no, it did not need to do that; it would just simply spend the money.

The second thing we said was that if we were trying to reduce the greenhouse gases emitted by Canada, should that not be a filter on the greenhouse gas program? Could we not put that down as a measure, as a marker to say that we were going to achieve the most greenhouse gas reductions possible? The government said, no, why would it do that, and it did not. As a result, the \$2 billion went out the door. It was a farm subsidy. Fine, if the government wants to do a farm subsidy, it can. However, \$2 billion goes out the door and greenhouse reductions from that subsidy are negligible, according to every study that has been done on it.

So in this policy vacuum, when bills such as Bill S-3 come along and the government waves them around and says it is fixing climate change and not to worry about it, it happens within the context of nothing else.

Certainly when the governments of the day were looking at developing the tar sands in the first go-round, they did not just do one-offs. They had a comprehensive strategy. They put every measure of government forward—money, research, support, and expertise—to develop that project, and lo and behold, it was successful. They are doing a lot of tar sands right now.

When it comes to the environment, there is not that same intelligence or that same authenticity and sincerity. That is what has been failing Canadians, and that is why this bill, while a small measure, is certainly not going to get the job done.

• (1100)

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this bill is about appliances, and the member rightly points out that the bill does not actually outlaw the biggest offenders, the appliances that are the greatest offenders. However, energy efficiency is about so much more than appliances.

In Nova Scotia, we have a ton of energy efficiency programs, some run by our utilities, some run by the provincial government.

For example, there is a commercial lighting program that actually helps commercial industries figure out what is the best lighting system for them, what is the most energy efficient lighting system. We have programs for energy efficient households and energy efficient businesses, even programs to help manufacturers choose the most energy efficient motors or refrigeration systems. These are big companies that we are talking about.

Because of this member's expertise in energy efficiency and other energy issues, I would be interested in his thoughts about energy efficiency programs beyond simple appliances.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, the folks in Halifax have done this for a long time. In fact, in many respects, they have led the country, not only on energy efficiency but also on waste reduction. They have thought about these as comprehensive strategies.

Government Orders

Right now the natural resources committee, to which the bill will be sent, is looking at integrated energy systems. We have looked at whether communities and regions have integrated energy systems, and right most do not. A few communities such as Halifax, Okotoks, Guelph and Vancouver are trying to integrate their energy systems and are thinking about them in a comprehensive way.

These are very challenging questions in my area of northwestern British Columbia. We must always be consistent and thoughtful of folks who do not live in our big metropolises, of those smaller communities that make an effort to do the same thing, communities that are more car and truck dependent and are more reliant on the primary heat because they tend to be farther north.

These communities can also be brought in, with efficiencies that make sense at their level and in their circumstances. This is why the cookie cutter approach by the government has not worked. It is why its policies have not been adopted across the country. The Conservatives pretend that all Canadians live in the same circumstances and that is not true.

If we were more adaptable, folks in northwestern British Columbia, in Halifax and others would pick up this charge. It makes sense environmentally and makes sense on a financial and personal level. The ethics and economics work out in this scenario and we need to push that. We need to have something a lot more comprehensive than this.

Last night, we passed Bill C-311, by the member for Thunder Bay—Superior North. It is a good bill and it sets out the framework for this.

The House needs to be much more aggressive and progressive on this. Canadians are expecting it and demanding it.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one thing I have not talked about very much, but is very important and it happens around the world, is extended producer responsibility. In fact, that applies a lot with electronics.

It has been done in the forefront by a lot of manufacturers, based upon metals and other types of materials in electronics, which are valuable through scrappage and so forth. There are also many environmental reasons for companies to have that responsibility. A company would either take the product back or would have process to dispose of it so it would not end up in landfills.

Many different problems arise from some of the electronics, which can cause contamination. As well, we have a high amount of recycling of those products, which is important. It not only does it preserve further metals from having to be extracted sooner, it also makes use of the materials in appliances that are no longer be of use.

Could my colleague comment on that policy? Where is Canada on this? I do not think we are anywhere near where we should be. Automobiles are one good example, but there is also electronics. Could the member comment on this? I know he has been around the globe and has seen what has happened in other places.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, there is this notion of cradle to grave product stewardship. When a product is designed by the manufacturer, there is a certain sense of ownership through the product's entire life and then brought back. We have seen this in

some small measures when we have looked at tires, or batteries or some of the more toxic products. We know there is a liability when a product is created.

There is an actual inherent and contained component that at some point someone will have to take care of, particularly when the components are toxic. We know that is true with electronics and the auto sector. When a computer is made, we know there are toxic elements contained it. Imagine all the computers that will eventually be released into the environment unless we plan otherwise.

We have seen the job creation potential in thinking about this and putting in rules that work this way, whether in electronics or otherwise. I have seen it in other countries with respect to the auto sector. Alongside assembly plants, which we all know well and are losing memory of because they are shutting down so fast as they flee to other jurisdictions, no thanks to the government, are de-manufacturing plants.

Electronics in automobiles are constructed in such a way that their deconstruction is imagined. Some of the resources contained in electronics within automobiles are precious resources. They are hard to find. They are often located in politically unstable parts of the world.

Why would we continue to design BlackBerries, washers, dryers and vehicles that require us to acquire more and more resources from a shrinking and limited world and in the process not create any jobs? Never mind the cost and burden to the municipalities, which are cash strapped now. They are dealing with landfills that are filling up with toxins and they can barely contain them. It is a huge challenge.

Our resources need to be considered in a comprehensive way. This bill goes some small steps toward something else, but until we have that comprehensive thinking in this place and show real leadership, Canadians will be on the hook for this stuff, because the liability transfers to them. The jobs that could be created are forsaken and that is wrong. It is simply wrong on all sorts of levels.

I thank my colleague for his leadership in the auto sector. If only the government had listened to some of his calls earlier on about the coming crisis and the types of things we are now seeing. It is a tragedy and a shame for families.

• (1105)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): 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. Barry Devolin): Accordingly the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Natural Resources.

Government Orders

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

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[*Translation*]

CANADA GRAIN ACT

The House resumed from March 3, 2009 consideration of the motion that Bill C-13, An Act to amend the Canada Grain Act, chapter 22 of the Statutes of Canada, 1998 and chapter 25 of the Statutes of Canada, 2004, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today to Bill C-13, An Act to amend the Canada Grain Act, chapter 22 of the Statutes of Canada, 1998 and chapter 25 of the Statutes of Canada, 2004.

This bill is exactly the same as former Bill C-39. The number C-13 may be unlucky, because the government does not seem to have learned from its mistakes. The previous bill had serious shortcomings. My speech today will focus on many aspects of the bill that should be improved so that it better serves grain producers and the industry.

Canada is in the midst of an economic crisis. Since the government introduced Bill C-39, we have learned that there will be job losses related to the proposed changes to the Canadian Grain Commission. It is expected that jobs will be lost because of the elimination of the Grain Appeal Tribunal, the end of registration and the cancellation of receipts, and the end of inspections and mandatory weigh-overs. In all these areas where the government wants to make changes, jobs will clearly be lost. This does not come as good news at a time when thousands of jobs are being lost. Passing this bill will unfortunately cause collateral damage, to use more military language, and people will find themselves on employment insurance.

The job losses will be concentrated in the ports of Vancouver and Thunder Bay. Jobs will also be lost in Winnipeg, mainly in inspection. In the longer term, other jobs could be cut in other regions, including Quebec. Grain is weighed and assessed in the ports of Montreal and Quebec City.

The most telling proof that this bill is a product of the Conservative ideology is that the government has not followed a single one of the recommendations made by the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, a committee on which you, Mr. Speaker, have had the pleasure of sitting for some time and where we have had the opportunity to work together. That committee examined Bill C-39 and made recommendations. It also studied a report from Group Compass Canada. The government has changed not one word in Bill C-39, now Bill C-13.

There are, therefore, a number of elements of uncertainty in this bill. We must remain vigilant. The reform of the Canadian Grain Commission is taking place in a specific context. We know the Conservatives are trying their best to dismantle the collective marketing mechanisms that protect the interests of producers. I am thinking of course of such things as the Canadian Wheat Board, but also of everything surrounding the current Doha round of

negotiations in Geneva. Moreover, once again last July there was a text on the table that placed the supply management system in jeopardy. That text was studied by seven countries, but Canada was not one of them. We did, however, have two ministers there, the present Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and the former Minister of International Trade, Michael Fortier, who was not re-elected.

The two of them were in Geneva to follow the discussions. The text that was on the table placed the supply management system in jeopardy. At the end of the negotiations, which fortunately did not result in an agreement between the countries, the two ministers expressed disappointment that it had not. Understandably, the sword of Damocles is still hanging over the heads of supply-managed farmers, and I need hardly tell hon. members there are very many such farmers in Quebec. The supply management system accounts for over 40% of Quebec's agricultural economy.

That being the case, great vigilance is required when we are examining any government bills relating to agriculture. What is more, the Conservative government has appointed a friend of the minister to head the Canadian Grain Commission. One might well wonder whether the new commissioner will defend the producers' interests or the minister's, particularly since the mandate of the Canadian Grain Commission has been modified. It is no longer required to act in favour of producers.

● (1110)

It was clearly written into the commission's mandate, yet it has disappeared from the bill. Any time bills deal with issues that directly affect producers, our focus should continue to be the economic health of agricultural producers.

I was talking about the chief commissioner, Elwin Hermanson, a former Reform Party member from 1993 to 1997. The Minister of Agriculture was Mr. Hermanson's campaign manager in 1993 when he first ran for election, and from 1993 to 1997, the minister was the constituency office coordinator for Mr. Hermanson, who appeared before the committee. In any case, while I do not mean to impute any motives, we can nevertheless ask ourselves if the head of the commission will have our producers' interests, first and foremost, in mind.

The government is implementing some recommendations of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, such as modernizing the mandate of the Canadian Grain Commission. One might now wonder if it did so correctly. I want to make it clear that, based on the speeches I have heard from my various colleagues and what we have also talked about in committee, everyone agrees that the Canadian Grain Commission's mandate must be modernized. The question we must now ask, and what we need to gauge here today is this: does Bill C-13 address the worries and concerns that have been raised, any more than Bill C-39 did in the past?

Government Orders

The Bloc Québécois is skeptical about some of these measures. That is important to note. We are skeptical about the elimination of the Grain Appeal Tribunal and the payment security program, because we do not know what will replace it. The Bloc Québécois also condemns the fact that the government has not introduced an office of grain farmer advocacy, as the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food recommended. I will have more time later to talk about some of the committee recommendations that have not been included in this bill.

What does the bill do? The government is changing the mandate of the Canadian Grain Commission in such a way that, in addition to the interests of grain producers, the commission would also consider the interests of the industry as a whole, including grain processors.

In order to clarify the Canadian Grain Commission's mandate, it will be split into two parts by Bill C-13. Part one will set out the CGC's core mandate to establish and maintain standards of quality for Canadian grain and regulate grain handling in Canada to ensure a dependable commodity for domestic and export markets. Part two will establish that the CGC shall specifically protect producer interests with respect to deliveries to elevators and grain dealers, access to binding CGC determination of the grade and dockage of grain deliveries, and the allocation of producer cars.

At present, the mandate of the Canadian Grain Commission is to, in the interests of producers, establish and maintain standards of quality for Canadian grain and regulate grain handling in Canada, to ensure a dependable commodity for domestic and export markets.

I would like to point out that clause 3 of Bill C-13 amends section 13 of the Canada Grain Act by removing the words "in the interests of producers" from the object to establish and maintain "standards of quality for Canadian grain and regulate grain handling in Canada to ensure a dependable commodity for domestic and export markets".

As we stated earlier, like the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-food, the Bloc Québécois supports modernization of the Canadian Grain Commission's mandate. Our party recognizes that the commission must be able to consider broader interests, such as public health, preserving the enviable reputation of Canadian grain producers, and other interests.

The Bloc Québécois is also sensitive to the concerns of grain producers who believe that Bill C-13 is drafted in such a way as to reduce the protection it affords grain producers. It should be understood that since Bill C-39 was first introduced before the election was called, therefore dying on the order paper, much water has flowed under the bridge. We have had all kinds of meetings, correspondence, telephone calls, visits from different people affected by the changes to the mandate of the Canadian Grain Commission.

• (1115)

That gave us a chance to weigh the pros and the cons of this bill. The cons are definitely adding up.

The National Farmers Union has told us that it is essential to preserve the language of the existing Act, which includes the expression "in the interests of producers", to describe the purpose of the Canadian Grain Commission and the standards of quality in the regulations respecting grain handling operations in Canada. In fact, the first recommendation in the COMPAS report was as follows:

The Standing Committee supports a redefined mandate of the Canadian Grain Commission as more in line with the practical reality of the Canadian grain industry and it recommends that any eventual bill clearly protect the interests of grain producers.

We know that the Conservative government is allergic to collective marketing mechanisms and instruments that enable producers to earn a fair market return. Deregulation and reducing constraints on the free market are key elements of their ideology, elements that, unfortunately, come through in this bill, as I will demonstrate.

The Canadian Grain Commission must not become another Canadian Food Inspection Agency. That organization has lost a lot of credibility over the past few years because it has been forced to choose between the two components of its dual mandate. Agricultural producers in Quebec and Canada are quite right to distrust this government, which has set its sights on the Canadian Grain Commission. It is clear that deregulating everything under the sun has not produced the desired results with respect to protecting producers.

The Bloc Québécois is ready to look at what can be done with the Canadian Grain Commission's mission. We are ready to do that. Can a bill like this really be amended? A lot of people have their doubts.

One of the problems with this bill is that it suggests that an office of grain farmer advocacy is no longer necessary. I strongly disagree. As for the protection of the interests of agricultural producers, we deplore the fact that the government rejected the third recommendation of the parliamentary committee, proposing the establishment of an office of grain farmer advocacy that would have reported directly to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food.

One might wonder if this is not another sign that the government wants to divest itself of any responsibility and thus deregulate the services of the Canadian Grain Commission. The mandate of the office of grain farmer advocacy, whose role would be similar to that of an ombudsman, would be to ensure that producers understand their rights under the act, and to defend their interests in disputes with other stakeholders.

We had a short briefing, an information session, with officials on this, and I asked a question on this very subject. I can report that I was not at all satisfied with the answer.

Like the parliamentary committee, we think that such an office would have ensured that the interests of producers are defended in disputes with the other stakeholders involved, including the Canadian Grain Commission. We believe that the communication, consultation, liaison and complaint investigation responsibilities assumed by such an office would have strengthened Canada's grain quality assurance system.

Another problem is the elimination of grain appeal tribunals. What does this bill do? The grain appeal tribunal hears the complaints of grain producers and companies that are not satisfied with the grades given by the commission's inspectors. The chair of the tribunal is an authorized grain inspector, but acting at arm's length. The other members of the tribunal come from the grain industry.

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The tribunal's position within the Canadian Grain Commission limits its legitimacy and perceived effectiveness. Moreover, clause 14 of the bill proposes to abolish grain appeal tribunals, which are currently established under sections 35 to 38 of the Canada Grain Act. From a reading of clause 31, on page 12, the proposed subsection 70(5), we understand that, in case of a disagreement over a ruling made by the chief inspector—who is the first level of appeal—grain producers will no longer be able to turn to the grain appeal tribunal. They will have to turn to the regular courts. Hon. members will understand that the message being sent to producers is quite simply that they have to fend for themselves, using their own money, as if they had any to spare, and defend themselves before the courts. That not only can be very costly, it can also take a very long time before a ruling comes down. We know all the things that can slow down the regular courts.

We note that the parliamentary committee did not address this issue. The COMPAS report commented that the Canadian Grain Commission's "grain appeal tribunal has earned some plaudits for effectiveness".

• (1120)

COMPAS continued, "Our impression is that the Tribunal is respected for its role in grading disputes, although at times some stakeholders sensed excessive influence on the part of the Office of the Chief Inspector." We heard that in committee as well. It was also stated that there is always room for modernization and improvement, but in my opinion that does not mean abolishing the tribunal. The Bloc Québécois awaits the government's explanations for this amendment.

Then there is the elimination of inspection and mandatory inward weighing, which is what the bill would do. Weighing and inspection of grain is carried out by the Canadian Grain Commission and is mandatory on bulk shipments overseas but optional for container movement or for exports to the United States.

Inward inspections are the weighing and grading that take place when railcars or trucks arrive at transfer elevators or terminal elevators. The Canadian Grain Commission then provides third-party weighing so as to forestall errors and to provide assurance to producers.

With its Bill C-13, the government is proposing that inward inspections take place only at the request of the shipper, but that outward weighing and shipping remain mandatory. Terminal and transfer elevator operators will be required to allow access to service providers who will do the weighing and inspection.

While the Canadian Grain Commission will no longer be involved in the delivery of this optional service, both shippers and elevator operators will have access to binding Canadian Grain Commission arbitration in the event of dispute over a grain grade.

Like the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, the Bloc Québécois supports optional inward inspection, as proposed by the government. We have been told that inward inspection is no longer universally required. According to COMPAS, "About half of railcars unloading at terminal elevators originate at primary elevators of the same company."

Rather than proceeding with complete deregulation, we should find a compromise for such cases, perhaps continuing to pay the costs for those who opt for this inspection. However, we also have questions about food safety inspections. I will come back to that if there is time.

We also agree with the arguments presented in the committee report to the effect that the Canadian Grain Commission could abandon kernel visual distinguishability when this method is replaced by one that is more efficient, according to recommendations 5 to 7 of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food. Contracting out of inspection services must be evaluated in a pilot project and the government, after three years, must evaluate the real impact.

We must be careful, however. Since inward inspection is optional, this could increase unit costs and prices by decreasing economies of scale. Making it optional would likely put smaller grain companies that do not have a terminal elevator at a disadvantage in terms of competitiveness. Inspection and weighing fees are collected from the farmer at the primary elevator. Optional inward inspection would benefit larger companies that have a terminal elevator by allowing them to avoid payment of the fees and offer a better price to farmers. Grain companies that have a better geographic location will be in a better position to take advantage of mixed shipments.

It is therefore important to promote competition in the grain handling system by helping the smaller companies. That is why we believe that the Canadian Grain Commission must have sufficient funding so that the commission can maintain efficient and timely services for both producers and smaller handlers who need such services for transactional purposes.

There are many other elements I could talk about, but I will just mention certain irritants in this bill. As I said, we received a huge amount of correspondence indicating that there were serious flaws in this bill. For example, the Agriculture Union said that if Bill C-13 were passed, some 200 commission employees, most of them front-line service providers, would lose their jobs.

The Agriculture Union, a component of the Public Service Alliance of Canada, represents most of the employees of the Canadian Grain Commission. Obviously, these people met with us and shared their concerns.

I also want to mention that I have here a report from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives that talks about the problems with this bill. The report is entitled *Threatened Harvest*.

• (1125)

It is important that the members of this House be aware of this report and the other elements that show that Bill C-13 has huge flaws.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[Translation]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties, and I seek the unanimous consent of the House to adopt the following motion:

That the Third Report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, presented on Wednesday, February 25, 2009, be concurred in.

[English]

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting 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)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

CANADA GRAIN ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-13, An Act to amend the Canada Grain Act, chapter 22 of the Statutes of Canada, 1998 and chapter 25 of the Statutes of Canada, 2004, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for British Columbia Southern Interior for questions and comments.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his very interesting and informative speech on the Canadian Grain Commission. He referred to food safety. I would like to know his thoughts on that subject. Is there a connection between Bill C-13 and food safety in Quebec and Canada?

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague very much for his question.

At the end of my speech, I spoke of the report that was presented. Bill C-13 does take food safety into account. We are aware of the possibility of certain risks. According to the report, Bill C-13 is forgetting the lessons learned about the danger of reducing public inspections. The bill would, in fact, eliminate the independent governmental inspection of grain delivered to the main silos in Canada, and would leave the grain companies free to organize their own inspections.

Not wishing to rub salt into any wounds, I would point out that this was exactly what we learned in committee. We were told that a permanent employee of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency was let go because he provided his union with a document indicating that the government was preparing to deregulate, and in fact had already

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begun, as far as the number of inspectors was concerned. We are all aware of what happened in the listeriosis crisis. There is reason for the general public, and the consumers of food items, be they meat or grain, to be very worried about the direction the government is taking with respect to food safety.

“Keeping pesticide-treated grain, glass, rodent excreta and other dangerous contaminants out of Canada’s food grain system is too important a responsibility to hand to grain companies,” said Scott Sinclair, senior researcher for the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives study I mentioned earlier. We certainly have reason to be concerned about this government’s policy.

● (1130)

[English]

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I, too, listened to the member’s remarks and appreciated them. As well, I appreciate the tremendous work that this member does on the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food.

I know that he was there during the original hearings that we had on the Canadian Grain Commission. In the last Parliament the government introduced Bill C-39. There was a lot of opposition to Bill C-39 and it died on the order paper. I would have thought that the government, by introducing Bill C-13, would have changed the bill to accommodate those concerns, and there are many. I outlined them in my remarks earlier.

I think the key concern is that the bottom line principle in Bill C-39, previously, and Bill C-13, now, changes the mandate of the Canadian Grain Commission from being in the interests of producers to being in the interest of industry.

This Canadian Grain Commission has been around for a long time. In fact, it has put Canada as the number one reliable supplier of quality grains in the world. This undermines our being a quality grain supplier, but more so undermines the protection for producers.

Is the government just not listening? Does it not care about producers? How is this government bill going over in Quebec relative to that issue? I wonder if the member could comment.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what I was just saying. I mentioned Bill C-39. The government had to be aware that it provoked major reactions across Canada, not only among members of the inspectors’ union, who could lose their jobs—I read some quotes earlier—but among agricultural producers themselves. Its mandate is being changed, transformed, even though it has been clear for years that the commission is supposed to carry out its mandate in the interests of the agricultural producers. Now it is going to be in the interests of the industry. Everyone agreed that the bill and the Canadian Grain Commission needed updating, but the government’s approach to making those changes caused an outcry. That is what was in Bill C-39.

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We have good reason to wonder why the government failed to learn from its mistakes and decided to reintroduce the same bill. It is exactly the same thing. Bill C-13 is a carbon copy of Bill C-39. Between the first and the second iterations, the government should have done some work. It should have paid attention to people's concerns and outright protests. The opposition has always pointed out the bill's shortcomings. Had the government been serious about doing its job, it would have introduced a modified bill that would have responded, at least in part, to some of these concerns. But it did not do its job. It simply changed the bill's number and reintroduced it, and here we are now. People still have the same concerns, and they are still just as worried as they were before.

• (1135)

[*English*]

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is once again a pleasure to be here in front of a full House. I am sure I will get a standing ovation from all of my colleagues after my speech.

I am happy to speak to Bill C-13, An Act to amend the Canada Grain Act. As has been said earlier on, the all-party Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food had made a number of recommendations. For example, it recommended that any eventual bill clearly protect the interests of grain producers. We are seeing that this bill does not address that explicitly. Another recommendation was to conduct a cost benefit analysis of contracting out services prior to any further movement on this issue. Of course, this has not yet been done.

Another recommendation was to support pilot projects in contracting out services for grain inspection. In other words, to try and see on a small scale if this would work. To my knowledge, this has not yet been done. Another recommendation was for the Canada Grain Commission to receive adequate funding to improve its services, particularly regarding the flexibility of authorizing overtime. We have not seen any substantial increase in funding for the Canada Grain Commission.

All members of all parties recommended that the federal government report back to the standing committee prior to the tabling of new grain legislation on the various models that could be implemented for protecting grain farmers. As we see, to date, this had not been done.

As we debate this bill, the question we have to ask ourselves here is: Are we moving ahead without the proper groundwork? Are we moving ahead without having conducted the necessary study and evaluation of what this could mean for the history of the grain industry in Canada?

[*Translation*]

After studying the report, the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food tabled a report in the House, and many of the recommendations in that report are reflected in the bill. The committee recommended first and foremost that any eventual bill clearly protect the interests of grain producers. Bill C-13 makes major changes to the structure of the CGC that have producers afraid that the commission will not be required to act for the benefit of the grain industry as a whole. There is a difference here: by putting the interests of grain companies and farmers on the same footing, the

government is not taking into account the power imbalance between them.

Bill C-13 does not provide for creating an independent office of grain farmer advocacy, as the committee recommended in order to protect producers' interests. If the commission does not have the authority to act decisively for the benefit of producers, the grain companies will try, slowly but surely, to have it eliminated completely.

Once again, we see this bill as a step toward the deregulation of the agri-food industry here in Canada. We must be very careful before making such a decision.

[*English*]

Instead of helping Canada's grain producers in these troubled economic times, the amendments to the Grain Act could and would shift the purpose of the Grain Act away from protecting producers' interests and expose them to financial harm by eliminating the requirement for grain buyers to post security bonds.

It would also dismantle the Grain Appeal Tribunal, which protects producers from unscrupulous behaviour on the part of grain companies, and eliminates the commission's services that independently determines the quality and quantity of grain delivered, returning producers to the position of not knowing if they are receiving fair payment.

Agriculture union president Bob Kingston says:

These changes will hurt grain producers just like the Conservative's effort to strip farmer control of the Canadian Wheat Board. They also threaten the quality advantage Canadian producers enjoy over competitors.

The Canadian Grain Commission has served as an independent arbitrator working to settle disputes when they arise about the quality and quantity of grain that producers bring to the market. Typically this function protects producers and makes sure that they are fairly paid by the powerful companies which buy and export.

Canada's reputation for top quality grain is protected by the grain inspection services supplied by the Grain Commission. We understand that if this bill is accepted, there will be around 200 jobs lost, in other words, inspectors who are there to ensure quality and to protect Canadian citizens and our customers.

The commission also provides independent, objective and comprehensive information about the quality and quantity of Canadian grain that is crucial to the international marketing efforts of the Canadian Wheat Board.

The proposal that we have before us would diminish the Canadian Grain Commission by killing the commission's inward inspection and weighing service, leaving producers disadvantaged in their dealings with grain companies when it comes to determining grain weight and grade.

With a loss of the commission's weighing and grading service, producers may not be paid for the quantity and quality of grain delivered. Currently, the Canadian Grain Commission routinely revises upward grain grades and corrects quantity measurements, resulting in fair payment to producers. While producers have the option to hire a private company to grade and weigh their grain under the Conservative proposal, no companies capable of this task exist today, so once again we are moving forward without crossing the *t*'s and dotting the *i*'s.

We do not have a plan. We have not done the research to ensure there will be no problems if we move ahead with this bill.

Another point of this bill will eliminate the requirement for grain buyers to post security bonds and expose grain producers to financial harm in the event of grain buyer bankruptcy or refusal to pay. It also dismantles the Grain Appeal Tribunal, which protects producers and the Canadian Wheat Board from unscrupulous behaviour on the part of grain companies.

In Vancouver alone it is normal for more than 100 appeals to be launched in a day. These changes may result in increased costs to producers with a shift to a for profit service delivery model.

I would just like to emphasize that the Canadian Grain Commission and the Canadian Wheat Board's collective marketing strategies that we have developed exist to protect producers, often from the profit-making motivations of the large multinationals. We have seen that before and we see that today.

What is also disturbing is that Bill C-13 poses a risk to Canada's international reputation. Our grain is in demand because no other country offers a quality guarantee backed by a system of government inspections as stringent and as comprehensive as is done in Canada.

It is also there to protect our quality brand. Canada even has programs and procedures to prevent Canadian grain from being mixed with imported U.S. product to ensure the integrity of Canada's quality guarantee. According to the report "Threatened Harvest: Protecting Canada's world-class grain system", put out by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, there could be a problem with the quality and safety of the grain because of a lack of inward inspection.

● (1140)

Along with Canada's international reputation as a producer of the highest quality at risk is the quality premium paid to Canadian producers. Once this quality incentive to ship Canadian grain separate from American grain is lost, we expect Canadian grain will be shipped over land, mixed with the lower quality American product and shipped through U.S. ports.

We do not have to be experts in agriculture or have a PhD. to understand that, by doing this, the quality of our product goes down. As the quality goes down, then our reputation as an exporter of grain goes down.

[Translation]

I would also like to quote from a press release from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, which says:

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The bill would also end an established security program for farmers that guarantees they are paid for the grain they deliver, thereby increasing farmers' risk of catastrophic financial losses if a buyer cannot, or will not, pay for delivered grain.

"In this global economic downturn, and with no workable alternative in place, the government is kicking away a key pillar of financial stability for Canadian grain producers," says CCPA Research Associate Dr. Jim Grieshaber-Otto.

I have met Mr. Grieshaber-Otto, who wrote the report. We need to pay attention to what he said. The press release goes on:

If these and other controversial government proposals are implemented, they would:

reduce the reputation and competitiveness of Canadian wheat in international markets;

decrease the price premium Canadian producers now receive for a distinctive product;

increase the risk of food-safety problems; and

augment the power of huge U.S.-based multinational grain companies at the expense of Canadian producers.

● (1145)

[English]

I would also like to quote from a press release put out by the National Farmers Union, another group that is very upset with the bill. It represents many farmers across western Canada. It states:

The bill will add tens of millions of dollars of extra cost to farmers. The CWB and farmers will have to spend their own money to replace the destruction of independent testing by the Grain Commission. Regardless of the extra money spent by farmers, the tests will still not be seen to be independent and unbiased. Regardless of whether it is the Canadian Wheat Board that does the test or a contracted private testing company, the testing results will not have the credibility or standing that the current Canadian Grain Commission test has.

According to the National Farmers Union press release:

Bill C-13 is aimed at deregulating the grain industry, and would fundamentally change the mandate of the Canadian Grain Commission... "It removes the requirement that the CGC operate as a public interest watchdog that regulates the overall grain industry in the 'interest of producers'. Instead, it changes the CGC's role to become a passive service provider that provides grading, weighing and inspection services to grain companies on a fee-for-service basis. Farmers' protections will be reduced to a minimum, with plenty of loopholes for companies to circumvent those limited protections.

Bill C-13 would eliminate inward inspection and weighing of grain, thereby undercutting the CGC's ability to maintain high-quality standards, and putting grain farmers and consumers at risk.

It is for this reason that today I move:

to delete all the words in the motion following "That", and replace them with the following:

"Bill C-13, An Act to amend the Canada Grain Act, Chapter 22 of the Statutes of Canada, 1998 and Chapter 25 of the Statutes of Canada, 2004 be not now read a second time, but that it be read a second time this day six months hence".

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Questions and comments, the hon. member for Malpeque.

● (1150)

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my hon. colleague and his fairly severe criticism of Bill C-13. He gave bit of history on the Canadian Grain Commission as well.

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He spoke to one of the key areas, and I am not sure if I am quoting him quite correctly, because he did not elaborate a lot on this. He talked about the risk to Canada's international reputation. As we see it on our side, the way the government has proposed the bill, there is a real concern for producers. The government is clearly favouring the corporate sector over primarily producers by the way it is moving forward with the amendments to the bill.

We see problems with the loss of inward inspections in the quality of grains potentially moving into the domestic market and possibly into the United States. There is a real concern for producers over the loss of bonding. However, as to the risk to Canada's international reputation, could the member expand on that issue, because is a serious matter?

Canada is seen as the most reliable supplier of high quality grains around the world. Whereas the United States is seen as a residual supplier and does not match our quality in any shape or form. It seems the government may be moving to Americanize our system, which I think would be a sad thing. Does the member have any comments on that?

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Speaker, I enjoy working on the agriculture file with my hon. colleague on committee.

Above and beyond all, I am a Canadian nationalist. I believe that we need to protect Canadian interests before we protect the interests of anybody else.

Yes, I believe our international reputation could be tarnished. It is just obvious. If there is a chance that our high quality wheat could be mixed with a lower quality wheat, our customers will be dissatisfied. If there is a slight chance, whether it would be a lack of KVD or a lack of inward inspection, that we do not maintain a high quality, then our international reputation will be tarnished.

Let us make no mistake about it. There are pressures, not only at the World Trade Organization but from the big multinational corporations that would love to see this happen. This is why it is so important to have the bill explicitly state that it protects the right of producers. This is why it is so important to have the bill state that it will explicitly ensure there will be no loss in quality of Canadian grain and that we will have an independent body to keep track and monitor the quality.

Otherwise, yes, we will lose our international reputation, which will definitely not be good for farmers.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague's passionate commitment to producers is second to none in this place.

The Prime Minister recently did a whirlwind circuit media tour in the United States, and now at the G20 in London. He talked about the need for good regulation and how proud he was of Canada's regulatory environment with respect to the financial circuit.

Now the government is doing what the Prime Minister actually believes. For years he was a critic of those regulations in the financial sector. For years he said that bank mergers should be allowed in Canada. This is all on the record. There is no casting aspersions here.

Now we see the aspect of regulations with respect to the quality of Canadian grains, which has been noted are the best in the world. Why, at a time when food security and food safety issues are of such strong importance to Canadians as well as protecting Canadian producers, would the government try a backdoor method of lowering the regulatory environment, putting that regulatory environment in the hands of the people buying the grain, which puts them in a deep conflict of interest, rather than in the hands of the producers, who have the highest interest in maintaining quality?

Why is the Prime Minister speaking one way when he talks to the American administration and the world body and another way at home with the legislation that the government is proposing?

• (1155)

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Speaker, my colleague's question is a good one. I do not often do this, but I will start by giving credit to the Prime Minister for understanding that regulation is necessary in banking. People in politics make decisions and we have to understand that if they are the wrong ones, we will make the right ones.

I will take this decision with regard to regulation and deregulation one step further. For example, I have received many letters from people with small businesses in my riding. They are really concerned about credit card fees and the whole idea that Interac will be deregulated and they will be unable to make any money because of the increase in fees. Yet we do not seem to be doing anything. I do not want the Prime Minister or another prime minister years down to the road to say that it is time to start regulating the grain industry.

If we see a potential problem, we have to be proactive. As I said earlier in my speech, we have to dot the *i*'s and cross the *t*'s so later we do not say, "I didn't believe it was right, but now it is time to regulate". Let us ensure we have a strong Canadian wheat industry that is regulated now and protects our farmers.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for all the work he has done across the country on the issue of food security.

When we look at what has happened in the world now, it is not only an issue of rights as individuals to consume foods that will not poison them or make them ill. In my riding Sealtest had to recall milk. It did not provide the necessary notification in an appropriate manner and it consequently led to some human suffering. One of the local police officers became ill.

Across the globe, the issue of food security is becoming more and more prolific. Would my colleague comment on that? One of Canada's strengths is having a fair and balanced regulatory food safety inspection and development process, which includes grain. That is an asset for us as a country. For those countries that do not have it, destabilization with regard to the food issue is occurring. Could he comment on that? It is an asset for Canada and it would be unfortunate if we gave that up.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Speaker, food safety means safe food. Food security means having enough food. Food sovereignty means having control over food. We should be striving for that three-pillar approach in Canada.

I quoted earlier from a report by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, which mentioned an instance that happened in Canada. It was the example of ergot. It stated:

—a dangerous fungal disease which occurs in western Canada, demonstrates the importance of maintaining rigorous government oversight, including inward inspections, in our grain system.

The report states:

Ergot infects rye, wheat and other cereal grasses, forming hard fruiting bodies that resemble dark kernels of grain. It contains powerful chemical alkaloids, from which LSD is made. When ingested even in small quantities in baked bread, ergot can cause violent muscle spasms, hallucinations and crawling sensations on the skin.

It goes on to say that in 2008 ergot was found on the border between Manitoba-Saskatchewan border and that was after 10–25% grain samplings. However, because of Canada's grain inspection system, we were able to ensure that dangerous levels of ergot were kept out of the food supply.

I think my hon. colleague was alluding to that. With unsafe products coming into our country and the scare we had with listeriosis, it is now more important than ever to do all we can to ensure our supply of food in Canada is safe and the food we send to other countries is safe.

• (1200)

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an unfortunate turn of events here in the opposition moving that amendment. I will be discussing this in a little bit, but I would like to present the government position regarding Bill C-13.

[Translation]

I am very pleased to express my support for Bill C-13, An Act to amend the Canada Grain Act. This bill illustrates the government's unwavering commitment to put our farmers first, by eliminating costly regulations and the inevitable, pointless problems currently facing Canada's grain industry.

Over the past few years, the grain sector in western Canada has undergone considerable transformation. The grain market has evolved, and it centres more and more on niche markets, livestock feed and biofuels, as well as other value-added opportunities.

Despite the ever-changing nature of the industry, the Canada Grain Act has not been significantly modified in nearly 40 years. Strictly speaking, the activities of the Canadian Grain Commission, the body that maintains standards of quality for grain and regulates grain handling in Canada, do not reflect the needs of producers and the modern industry. Before explaining any further the proposed changes to the Canada Grain Act, I would like to provide a few basic facts.

In 2005, an amendment to the Canada Grain Act was passed, thereby requiring an independent review of that act and the Canadian Grain Commission.

[English]

COMPAS Inc. was hired by the Department of Agriculture to conduct the independent review. Its recommendations were presented to Parliament in 2006. The COMPAS report was referred to the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, which

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consulted stakeholders and recognized a need for changes to the Canada Grain Act and the Canadian Grain Commission.

The amendments are based on the recommendations made by the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food in its report to the government in 2006.

Throughout these reviews, stakeholders were consulted extensively, including eight public meetings held across the country by COMPAS Inc. Hence, these proposed changes reflect the needs and the will of grain producers and the industry.

This government is proposing to clarify the mandate of the Canadian Grain Commission in the Canada Grain Act. The clarification will stress that the Canadian Grain Commission protects the interests of producers with respect to deliveries to licensees, determination of grade and dockage, and allocation of producer cars.

That said, there have been extensive changes within the Canadian grain industry over the years and the Canadian Grain Commission must reflect that evolution. The number of primary elevators in western Canada has dwindled. Grain companies have consolidated their operations and now much of our grain is shipped from primary elevators to port terminals owned by the same company. Currently, the Canadian Grain Commission must inspect and weigh all grain received by terminal and transfer elevators.

To keep up with the changing environment, the government strongly believes that producer interests are best served by limiting costs and fostering a competitive, efficient grain handling system. Consequently, the government proposes to eliminate mandatory inward inspection and weighing requirements. The bill would reduce unnecessary mandatory costs from the grain handling system and would work to build a lower cost, more effective and innovative grain sector. We are reducing the regulatory burden with this initiative. As all costs in the system eventually work their way to farmers, this would result in a less costly system for farmers, too.

Nevertheless, inward inspection and weighing do provide value to producers, in some circumstances. The government has proposed amendments to the Canada Grain Act that would facilitate private sector delivery of inward services when requested. Thus, the elimination of inward inspection and weighing would create business opportunities for private sector service providers. It is best left to the shippers themselves to determine when and at what level these services are provided.

As an important and ongoing check on this new arrangement, producers and industry would be able to apply to the Canadian Grain Commission for binding grade arbitration when they are not sure that the right grade has been assigned. The proposed changes would not reduce the capacity to ensure a dependable commodity to buyers of Canadian grain. What is more, international buyers of Canadian grain could rest assured that every vessel load would continue to receive the Canadian Grain Commission's certification of grade and weight.

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On another topic, the Canadian Grain Commission producer payment security program has been the subject of debate in the grain sector. Currently, all licensed grain handlers must provide financial security to the Canadian Grain Commission. If a licensed grain handler fails to pay for the grain it has purchased, the Canadian Grain Commission steps in to compensate producers.

Unfortunately, this security program is flawed as it is not 100% effective and it adds costs to the Canadian grain handling system. These costs negatively affect the competitiveness of the Canadian grain sector.

As part of the move away from kernel visual distinguishability, or KVD, the Canadian Grain Commission must be equipped with tools it can use in a post-KVD environment. This is why this government proposes that the Canada Grain Act be brought under the Agriculture and Agri-Food Administrative Monetary Penalties Act. This proposed reform follows a Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food recommendation to use monetary penalties to help enforce a declaration system upon grain delivery. The Canadian Grain Commission must be equipped with penalties to protect the quality of Canadian grain.

• (1205)

With respect to the impact on jobs at the Canadian Grain Commission, the commission will be working with staff over the duration of the legislative process to assess the full impacts of the proposed changes. We understand this process may have a significant impact on the lives of the affected public servants, and we are committed to working with them in a clear and transparent manner.

[*Translation*]

In conclusion, the proposed amendments are merely part of the ongoing transformation of the grain sector in western Canada. Western Canadian grain is increasingly destined for value-added domestic enterprises, and government policy and legislation must adapt to that reality. In this ever-changing environment, the Canada Grain Act and the Canadian Grain Commission must be modernized.

Thanks to these amendments, the Canadian Grain Commission will be in a better position to provide producers with a more cost-effective grain quality assurance system. These amendments are crucial to eliminating unnecessary and costly regulations within the Canadian grain sector. The government is committed to looking out for the interests of our producers, first and foremost.

The integrity of Canada's grain quality assurance system and the reliability of the Canadian brand will be maintained.

Once again, I am honoured to express my support for the government's proposed changes to the Canada Grain Act.

[*English*]

I will now make a few comments about the hoist motion that was raised by the NDP member regarding this bill. I will clarify for Canadians that this is a very unfortunate turn of events. It is my fear that this is being done for partisan reasons. I will explain it as such.

As we know, here in the House we have a process for the passage of bills. We have first reading, where the House and the public are

first advised of the government's proposed legislation. We then move into second reading, which is where we find ourselves now, where we enter into healthy debate among ourselves as MPs and among political parties to explain the legislation and the different points of view concerning it. The bill then moves to committee for further review. This is where very important work is done. Witnesses can come before the committee and explain all sides of the issue at hand. The committee normally undertakes the work of listening to witnesses who, for example, would be in favour of changes proposed in the legislation. The committee would also hear of changes that cause concerns. Producers, companies and grain terminals would all have participation in this process. Of course, the bill can be modified by committee. The bill then comes back to the House for final debate and vote.

I pointed all that out because there is a process here. I was here for all of the opposition members' speeches and I listened to their concerns with the bill. I understand that they may not be pleased with all aspects of the bill. Personally, I think it is a rather good bill, but I and the government are open to the fact that there will be valuable input obtained, particularly during the committee process, from the opposition members and witnesses.

However, this hoist motion basically kills that process. The hoist motion, as read by my NDP colleague, sounds like he wants to delay the furtherance of this bill. I have Marleau and Montpetit in front of me and I would like to clarify for Canadians and those who are watching the debate exactly what the hoist motion means in reality. Marleau and Montpetit states:

The hoist amendment originated in British practice, where it appeared in the eighteenth century. It enabled the House of Commons to postpone the resumption of the consideration of a bill. It was subsequently agreed that the adoption of such an amendment by the House was tantamount to the rejection of the bill, since the postponement was deliberately set for a date after the end of the session. Normally, if the session went beyond that date, the bill was not placed again on the Order Paper.

Historical events were responsible for the establishment of three or six months as the postponement period. A hundred years ago, sessions rarely lasted longer than six months, and so a six months' hoist amendment would be proposed at the beginning of a session, and a three months' hoist in the final weeks of a session. Today, sessions of the House of Commons of Canada are longer, but the length of sessions is neither regular nor fixed in advance.

The adoption of a hoist amendment (whether for three months or six months) is tantamount to the postponement of the consideration of the bill for an indefinite period. Consequently, the bill disappears from the Order Paper and cannot be introduced again, even after the postponement time has elapsed. The bill is accordingly defeated indirectly. It is no longer possible to place the bill back on the Order Paper, because to do so would be ruled contrary to the decision of the House. Members have tried to apply the hoist amendment to a resolution or to include it in the text of a reasoned amendment, but these attempts were ruled out of order.

The key here is that this hoist motion actually kills the bill before it even has a chance to make it to committee. As I pointed out in my speech, this is not the first time that the House has seen this bill. In fact, my colleagues saw this bill in the last Parliament and yet there was no attempt to move forward with a hoist motion. This makes me reflect that this is a partisan motivated motion. We have the three opposition parties working together. They do not care what producers have to say. They do not care what the input is or what kind of feedback we would receive at committee. They only care about some sort of a partisan purpose that they have at hand here and they are working in collusion.

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•(1210)

I have tried to work with my colleagues in the other parties in a very constructive manner. We will have an opportunity at committee to hear from all sides of the argument. The opposition critics of agriculture will have ample opportunity, both in committee and in the media, to express their opinions on this important legislation but they do not want any of it. They simply want to kill the bill. They want to work in collusion to the detriment of our grain producers and we need to wonder why.

It is my hope that during this debate on the hoist motion, the opposition members will level with Canadians and make their reasoning for the motion clear. There is no question that the legislation being proposed would be very positive improvements to the Canada Grain Act.

As I mentioned at the beginning of my speech, the last amendments to this act were done 40 years ago. I think we can all agree that farming, agriculture, the handling of grain has changed over the last 40 years. It is reasonable and, I would say, expected of the government to put forward amendments to improve the Canada Grain Act so that it better serves Canadians and our producers. I say this particularly in these challenging economic times. It is not advantageous to our producers to pay the additional costs that are inherent in processes that are redundant or not necessary. If the opposition wants producers to continue to pay costs that are not necessary, I invite them to argue that case. I think it will fall on deaf ears because what we are hearing is that producers, particularly grain producers, want less costs imposed. They want to be able to retain more of their hard-earned money. If we have an opportunity here to simplify the processes, to simplify the legislation by which they are bound, then we should take advantage of that.

I will talk a moment about inward inspections. For example, there was a time when terminals were owned by different companies and the Grain Commission was involved in the inspection between those two different grain terminals owned by two different companies. Now, however, in many instances the terminals are owned by the same company and yet the legislation requires a public inspection of the grain between two terminals owned by the same grain company. It just does not make sense to obligate that inspection, particularly by government inspectors, all at the cost of the producer.

It is quite reasonable, and is actually a very effective and cost-efficient move, to remove the obligation to say that if a company owns both terminals it is possible to have the grain inspected again between the two terminals if it is so desired, but by the private sector. If there happens to be discontent with the final decision on the grading of that grain there is an appeal process in place. One of my colleagues was talking about the appeal process and the changes. We are simply eliminating some of the multi-levels of appeal, but there is still an appeal process and there would be a binding decision made through that appeal process in order to resolve differences.

Once again I must say that I am shocked. I was in the House when the hoist motion was moved by the NDP. I know its members have been working closely behind closed doors. I knew nothing of this. Rather than allowing the bill to be discussed at committee and discussed with producers, they are scuttling everything and killing the bill. They are talking about imposing up to a six month delay.

However, it is only fair that Canadians know what is really happening, which is that the bill is being killed right here on the floor during second reading. The opposition owes an explanation, particularly to our producers.

I sit on the agriculture committee where we have had producers in front of us. We are talking about competitiveness. There is some hypocrisy on the behalf of the opposition. Members say that they are concerned about competitiveness. Part of the competitive picture is lowering costs to producers. On the one hand, the opposition says that it is very concerned and want to work in the best interests of producers while on the other hand, it is killing a bill outright, with no chance for producers to have any say in this matter, for some partisan purpose, and that is very unfortunate.

As I mentioned, the opposition parties, particularly the opposition critics, must explain to Canadians why they are working in collusion against the government and against grain producers.

•(1215)

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member surprised me that he would go after the opposition in some of his last remarks. We are not trying to scuttle the bill. We are trying to bring the government to its senses. It has a responsibility to producers, not just to the multinational corporate sector. The problem here is that Bill C-13 does everything for industry and takes away protection, power and authority for producers.

Regarding the hoist motion, sometimes legislation is so bad and so terrible that it is basically unamendable, and that is what producers are telling us. The government has a record of failure in most areas relating to the farming community in this country, and I could go through a list, but had the government come forward with a bill that was at least a starting point, then we could get to the substance of the issue and amend it.

Maybe the parliamentary secretary and his minister should look in the mirror and accept their responsibilities for not having done their work. They had lots of time to do it, since the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food had first put forward its committee report several years ago. They had Bill C-39 and heard the criticism there and came in with another bill.

We do get the odd statement out of the minister when he is getting attacked on this issue in the country. When asked if farmers would be protected, he said:

We're not going to leave you hanging with nothing. We'll keep the program that's existing in place until something new comes along.

Producers want some assurances. They want to see what the protection is in legislation. They know the government cannot be trusted. They certainly know the minister cannot be trusted because they have seen his attack, trying to break the law, and the Federal Court trying to stop them on the Canadian Wheat Board issue.

My question for the parliamentary secretary is simple. Why did the Government of Canada, having all this time, not do its homework and come in with a bill that would have given us at least something to amend and work with?

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•(1220)

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Madam Speaker, I am so glad my colleague posed that question because it hearkens back to what I said during my speech. The opposition is not being open and forthright. Even in those comments, we hear that.

I will give an example. I mentioned this in my speech but he must have been busy reading something. In 2006, COMPAS was hired by the government to conduct a review. In 2006, the standing committee held hearings on the COMPAS report and it tabled its own reports. This was way back in 2006. Was there a hoist motion put forward at that time? Were there any kinds of blocking motions put in place? No.

In December 2007, Bill C-39 was introduced in Parliament by this government. That was a long time ago. The bill ended up dying on the order paper in September 2008, nine months later. That legislation was on the table for nine months. Did we hear these kinds of comments? Did we have a hoist motion to kill it? Did we have these kinds of outlandish remarks being made? Not at all.

Therefore, the question is actually for the opposition members. What is it that makes them feel so strongly about their position now, when for nine months in the last Parliament this was not an issue? They were willing to let this bill move to committee for proper review by committee and to allow the input of producers.

I will go back to this point. This legislation is aimed at helping our grain producers. In fact, throughout my speech I spoke about grain producers and how this will help our producers and lower costs. The member and my opposition colleagues should allow grain producers to come to the committee to comment on the legislation, but they are cutting this short. They do not want to hear from producers. Why is that? They are afraid of what they will hear. They are not interested in the input of Canadians. They want to kill the bill now before producers get a chance to speak out.

I will put this into context. What the agriculture minister was saying in the quote read out by my colleague was that we are open to working with the opposition and to working with producers to make this the best bill for producers. When they kill the bill outright like this, it is very hard to work with the opposition when it moves in such an aggressive fashion.

•(1225)

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Madam Speaker, rather than condemning us, I thought that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture would actually be thanking us for moving the hoist motion because it saves the government the embarrassment of seeing a major piece of legislation go down in defeat because it is so flawed.

What we are giving the government is a time out. The government should be very familiar with the concept of a time out. A little prorogation goes a long way sometimes to making a government come to its senses. This is no different. It does not say that the bill will be killed forever. It is saying that the government should go back and listen to what the farmers and producers are saying, listen to their concerns, and come back with something that is in the interests of the family farm and individual producers.

I represent a community that is home to the Canadian Wheat Board and the Canadian Grain Commission, two institutions that are part of the fabric of this nation. They represent the farmers and the interests of the farmers. Historically they have stood to protect individual producers, not the big multinational corporations. They ensure that the producers have the power to stand on an equal footing with the multinational corporations and not see their interests diminished or squashed or their rights eroded.

This bill is flawed. I only have to refer to some of the individual producers and of course the National Farmers Union who have said that this bill must not be allowed to pass. That is why we moved the hoist motion. National Farmers Union president Stewart Wells said that the changes that are lurking beneath the surface are not readily apparent, but they will be devastating to grain farmers.

Why did we move the hoist motion? Because this bill is deregulating the grain industry. It eliminates inward inspection and weighing of grain. It eliminates the requirement that grain companies be licensed and bonded, and so on. It puts individual farmers at the mercy of the big multinational corporations. It does not stand up for farm incomes and food safety. That is exactly why the hoist motion has to pass.

Is the parliamentary secretary now prepared to see the wisdom of the voices of farmers and act in their best interests?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Madam Speaker, there are a couple of points that have to be addressed.

The member is against the legislation, but where was she between December 2007 and September 2008, when this bill was actually sitting here in the House in the last Parliament? Now she is outraged. Why is that? There is a partisan purpose at foot, and it is not to serve the best interests of our producers. That much is certain. There is collusion among the parties. The three opposition parties are working together to defeat the bill outright.

The member was inaccurate in her comments. She said that the hoist motion does not kill the bill, that it simply postpones the bill. That is highly inaccurate. I am glad I have the opportunity to address this again.

Marleau and Montpetit states that the adoption of a hoist amendment is tantamount to defeating the bill by postponing the bill's consideration. Consequently the bill disappears from the order paper and it cannot be introduced again even after the postponement period has elapsed.

Those are the kinds of inaccuracies the opposition parties throw out to Canadians and grain producers. They need to be clear with their comments. They need to be clear with their intentions. They need to be clear with the facts. They are not.

I am glad I had the chance to correct the record. We will be holding the opposition members to account for what has happened today in the House, and I know producers will as well.

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Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the Liberal Party welcomes the hoist motion moved by my hon. colleague, because it has become increasingly evident that the government is not listening to the concerns expressed by the opposition in the House about the bill. Certainly it is clear that the government is not listening to the concerns of the primary producers.

The parliamentary secretary got it all wrong in his last remarks. The reason the opposition is taking such a strong stand against the bill is the government's failure when it comes to primary producers. Nowhere is that evidence of failure more clear than it is with this bill.

The government has not listened to any of the producers' concerns that were expressed during the committee hearings. It has not listened to the concerns that were expressed by producers on the original bill, Bill C-39. It has not listened to the concerns of producers between now and when Bill C-13 came into being. Obviously, the government is not listening to primary producers in this country. Therefore, the opposition parties are left with no choice but to try to bring the government to its senses and give us something that shows it is listening to producers and their concerns and not just to industry.

Calls are coming in every day from producers concerned about the bill. In fact, the principal reason for our supporting the hoist motion, which as stated by the parliamentary secretary, and I agree, will effectively remove Bill C-13 from the order paper for this session, is that the government has known for more than a year that all three opposition parties are concerned about it. Over the course of that time the amount of concern being expressed by primary producers, by the farm community, is unbelievable. I have not seen anything like it in my time in terms of the avalanche of concerns coming forward from industry on this particular bill.

There is strong concern, not about reforming and improving the Canadian Grain Commission, but about being complicit in its undermining and ineffectiveness. I do not want to see myself, my party does not want to see itself, and I understand that the other opposition parties do not want to see themselves as being complicit in undermining the Canadian Grain Commission and undermining its effectiveness for primary producers.

The major reason for the need to have this bill removed and reconsidered, redrafted and resubmitted is that the extent of the harm this legislation would do, given the extent of the amendments to the Canadian Grain Commission, are beyond the most recent parliamentary review of the activities of the Canadian Grain Commission. That review was conducted by the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food after having heard from stakeholders across the country.

This morning the official opposition held a press conference on this very matter. The need for this press conference was that we have seen from the current government the ultimate in incompetence. It did not listen to the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, which held hearings several years ago. The government introduced former Bill C-39, which was severely flawed. The government had concerns coming forward from producers and opposition parties. It failed to address those concerns and introduced a new bill, Bill C-13, which was substantially the same.

● (1230)

Since it was first introduced in Parliament, information is getting out to our producers on how bad the bill is, and we are being inundated with calls telling us to kill the bill, to get rid of it. Therefore, this morning the official opposition held a press conference in which we said that Parliament must at its earliest opportunity block the government's Bill C-13, which is proposed amendments to the Canada Grain Act. At the press conference I outlined many of my concerns with the bill and I will list them quite simply and shortly.

It changes the mandate from being in the interest of producers to being in the interest of industry. It takes away the bonding requirement of companies which is there to protect producers. Producers sell half a million dollars of grain to a grain company and they get no protection in terms of that company being bonded. A producer could go broke as a result.

There is the whole issue of inward inspections, which my colleague from the fourth party outlined is really an issue of food security and food safety. I will get to that in a moment. The Canadian Wheat Board expressed some concerns a while ago in a press release it put out. If the CGC does away with inward inspection, it will have to be handled in some other way. The problem is, when it is handled in another way, who will handle those costs and take all the risks? It will be the primary producers.

Another problem with the bill is appeals on grades and weights. The chief grain inspector would have the ultimate authority, and the government even put in the bill that there is no appeal to the Federal Court. Imagine that. There is no appeal to the Federal Court. There is no way farmers who have faced an injustice can get to the justice system to appeal the decision made by an arbitrary regulatory authority. That is absolutely crazy in a democratic system such as ours.

This morning at our press conference, we said that the bill has to be stopped in the interest of the farm community. Our House leader said that there are three options. We could simply vote down the current Conservative motion asking for approval in principle; we could adopt a so-called hoist motion, which is the one we are talking about, which has been put forward by another party; or we could move a reasoned amendment. According to the rules of the House of Commons, any one of these three options would effectively kill the bill. There is no question that the bill must be stopped.

This is grain legislation. People in downtown Toronto and downtown Vancouver or even downtown Charlottetown probably do not understand the need for such strong regulatory actions in the grain industry.

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As I said earlier in my remarks, Canada has become the number one supplier of quality grains around the world. We are recognized as the top supplier of quality grains in the world, as a result of the efforts of the Canadian Grain Commission and certainly the producers in producing the kind of grains they produce.

• (1235)

To make the issue relevant to consumers and people in urban Canada, I would say that while functioning, regulatory systems tend to be invisible until tragedy occurs. It is only after somebody dies, either from drinking bad water or food or whatever, that people recognize the need for a regulatory system in the background to protect the interests of all.

In an article in the *Edmonton Journal* written by Scott Sinclair and Jim Grieshaber-Otto, this is what they said on another issue:

Citizens rightly expect their governments to protect them and to act in the public interest. Too often governments fail to do so, instead responding to corporate pressure to weaken regulations so that businesses can cut costs and increase profits. Recent outbreaks of food-borne illnesses — listeriosis in Canada, melamine contamination in China, and salmonella poisoning in the U.S. — underline the dangers to the public of cutting back on government oversight and inspections in the food system.

They went on to say:

Yet these lessons seem to be lost on the Conservative federal government, which is threatening another of Canada's highly successful regulatory systems. Legislation now before Parliament — Bill C-13 — would gut Canada's world-class grain regulatory system.

They go on to talk about some other points in the article saying that what the government is really doing is increasing the risk of catastrophic financial loss to producers and also that the government is more interested in creating opportunities for transnational corporations than in protecting Canadian farm and consumer interests. I certainly would agree with those points.

With the pressure from the farm community, we have no choice but to support this hoist motion because the government has not listened. It had the opportunity since it first introduced the legislation to at least tell us what it was going to do. Instead, we hear statements from the minister along the lines of, "Don't worry, we will fix it".

Canadians now know full well that they cannot trust the Prime Minister and the government. A statement saying it will fix it at some future date is just not acceptable. We have not seen any intention on the part of government that there is anything in the wings, behind the scenes, that is going to propose to amend this legislation in a proper way.

Let me speak a little more about inward inspection, which is a critical issue in terms of the legislation itself and why it is necessary to effectively close down this bill.

On the issue of inward inspection, the government has indicated it is removing the role of the CGC. The Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, in a unanimous report, acknowledged that mandatory inward inspection is not a universal requirement while outward inspection and weighing is. The committee stated in its report, again supported unanimously:

—several strong factors seem to support optional inward inspection: the inward inspection requirement is already not universal; optional inspection would not affect producer rights of access to the terminal; and producers and the Canadian Wheat Board should not be unduly affected financially if a proper publicly

supported infrastructure and pricing system are put into place in light of the public benefits of maintaining an inward inspection capability.

The fact is that while the government is removing the inward inspection provision, the work called for by the committee has never been done. The government has not done the work called for by the committee itself.

• (1240)

To just go on a little further, the government has to explain why it has decided, prior to the legislation, to downgrade, as expressed in the estimates for the commission under the section which describes the activity as providing "Consistent and reliable grain quality and grain safety assurance to meet the needs of domestic and international markets", the forecasting spending. In 2011-12 it will be \$23.4 million; in 2007-08, the planned spending was \$50.2 million. By the Canadian Grain Commission's own records, the government will reduce the ability of the Canadian Grain Commission to do its job by \$26.8 million.

I have to ask the question: Is this a matter of the government cutting costs on the backs of primary producers and the safety of consumers in this country? Is that what the government is really doing behind closed doors?

Staffing, as a previous member mentioned, will be reduced from 664 FTEs in 2007-08 to 421 in 2009-10. Somebody, I believe it was the parliamentary secretary, mentioned earlier that there is employment insurance and so on and so forth. That is not the point. The point is these people are needed in the industry to protect producers in the public's interest. This is not just about money. This is about protection and regulations in Canadian society that are direly needed.

A recent study of the Canadian Grain Commission itself found the following issues with respect to the loss of inward inspection, and I will go through them.

First, inward weighing and inspection, that would still be required, would be less trustworthy and more expensive.

Second, the grain system would lose an important early detection system for contaminated grain. Eliminating inward inspection by public officials would increase the likelihood of contaminated grain being comingled with larger quantities of clean grain.

Third, shipments to Canadian and United States markets would lose an important level of protection against contamination. Grain shipped to those markets could bypass official inspection. That is worrisome.

Fourth, inward inspection provides quality assurance information that makes outward inspection more efficient and cost-effective.

Finally, replacing public sector inspectors with private contractors, many of whom would be reliant upon private grain companies for business, would undermine the perceived reliability of the information derived from inward inspection.

Those are comments from a recent study by the Canadian Grain Commission itself.

Now, should Canadians worry? Should we, as opposition parties, worry? Definitely, we should. But where is the government? Why is not dealing with these serious concerns?

With respect to the diminished role of the Canadian Grain Commission, the study prepared by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives found, for example, with respect to the port of Vancouver the following problem, bearing in mind that Vancouver and Prince Rupert, as of December 2007, moved almost 1.2 million tonnes of grain through its facilities:

At a typical Vancouver elevator, CGC weighers routinely process the unloading of 50-100 rail cars during a shift. Documentation on these cars, their parcels, weights, any anomalies and other relevant information is provided by the weigher to the elevator at the end of each day.

It goes on to show that their service is very important.

Let me conclude. The reason for the hoist motion that we are now supporting is really simple. Clearly, the government had ample opportunity to come forward with a bill that was amendable and made sense to primary producers. It has failed to do so.

Second, farmers are expressing their concerns about the current government. They are asking us, "Where are the government backbenchers?" "What are they doing?" "Are they trained seals or what?" "Why are they not expressing their concerns on behalf of their constituents?" They have concerns and this bill should be stopped in its tracks.

The bottom line is it is not amendable. The government has failed to do its due diligence and the opposition has a responsibility to hold the government to account. That is why we are supporting the amendment presented by the member opposite.

• (1245)

Mr. Bradley Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have a comment and then two quick questions.

The people who are watching these proceedings on TV or following them later in *Hansard* should be aware that all the members of Parliament who represent producers and grain growers in the entire Wheat Board area of western Canada are supporting the government's legislation.

The opposition to this legislation is coming from members of Parliament who do not have producers in their riding. The people responsible to the producers are supporting it and the people who have no direct responsibility to producers are opposing it. That is my first comment to those watching.

Second, I have two questions. The hon. member pointed out that with this legislation passing, the system would be less expensive and less costly. Does the hon. member not agree that these costs are often passed on to farmers and that we as members should therefore try to reduce costs for producers? That is my first question.

The second question is this. Based upon this legislation, Canadian grain customers will receive the same Canadian Grain Commission certificates and assurances they are accustomed to. Does my hon. colleague no longer believe in Canadian Grain Commission certificates and assurances?

• (1250)

Hon. Wayne Easter: Madam Speaker, let me begin with the last question first. Of course, I believe in the Canadian Grain Commission certificates. That is what I want to maintain in the

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system because that is what put Canada on the map as a quality supplier. I do not want to see that undermined. The government is undermining that fact.

In terms of being less expensive and less costly, we always have to take costs out of the system where we can. However, the hon. member misinterprets me. It is not less costly and less expensive to the producers. In fact, a greater burden of risk is going to be imposed on producers as a result of these moves. Information the Canadian Wheat Board put out today and other proposals that might have to be put in place to accommodate the loss of inward inspection will actually mean a much higher burden of cost on primary producers.

Where the United States is covering costs to its primary producers under a system called WTO or GATT green and picking up those costs out of the public treasury, the government is going the opposite way. Instead of the government covering those costs, it is letting them be covered by primary producers.

On the last point of members over there representing the West, I wish they would. I wish they would listen. I wish they would return their phone calls. I wish they would listen to what primary producers are saying. However, as I said in my remarks, it seems to me that we have a bunch of trained seals over there who only take their direction from the PMO and not from their constituents.

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, NDP): Madam Speaker, the hon. member for Malpeque has raised a lot of good issues. I do not think we have trained seals here. I think we have predatory sea lions who are attacking the farmers base in Western Canada. I cannot imagine why they would continue to vote for them in the future.

To the hon. member for Malpeque, I would like to read a very short note to the Prime Minister from a western farmer from Saskatchewan. It says:

Dear Prime Minister,

In these troubled economic times, I hope your government will be working to support grain producers in the same way you are working with other sectors of the Canadian economy.

That's why I'm disappointed to learn that the Agriculture Minister has introduced changes to the Grain Act that will hurt grain producers.

Instead of helping Canada's grain producers the bill would:

Shift the purpose of the Grain Act away from protecting producer interests

Expose producers to financial harm by eliminating the requirement for grain buyers to post security bonds

Dismantle the Grain Appeal Tribunal which protects producers from unscrupulous behaviour on the part of grain companies

Eliminate Canadian Grain Commission services that independently determine the quality and quantity of grain delivered, returning producers to the position of not knowing if they are receiving fair payment.

If you think grain farmers are as important and worthy as those in the banking and auto industries that your government is supporting, I ask you to withdraw these provisions and make sure that these changes put the interests of grain producers first.

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The hon. member for Malpeque may want to comment on one of these western farmers who does not seem to be in lockstep with this backward move that would take us back to the 1800s in terms of grain regulation.

• (1255)

Hon. Wayne Easter: Madam Speaker, I think my hon. colleague, in quoting from the letter, actually makes the point very well. That is what increasing numbers of primary producers are saying. Producers who do not have an NDP bent, a Liberal bent or a Conservative bent, or may have all three, are saying exactly those things.

They are looking at the substance of the issue and they are telling the Prime Minister not to do this. Do not impose greater risks on primary producers. Do not impose greater costs on primary producers. Do not destroy a system that, as somebody said earlier, is old, but it works and has put Canada on the map as the number one grain quality supplier of the world. Conservative members from the west are clearly not listening.

I have a letter from the mayor of the city of Melville, who is concerned about the loss of the Canadian Grain Commission offices in his area and the work that the Canadian Grain Commission does.

All we are asking is that the government please come to its senses and do the right thing. It could withdraw the bill and come back with a new one where it would actually listen to producers. That would make a whole lot of sense.

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, earlier when the member for Saskatoon—Humboldt spoke, I really felt insulted as a member coming from an urban riding, in the way he described who supports and who does not support the bill. We care just as much about what happens on the family farm and in the entire food chain system.

I remember that it was my colleague Dennis Mills who made Canada aware of the family farm. Maybe that is why I am surprised that farmers vote for these guys. That is why they do not get any votes in the greater cities. It is for that reason alone.

The member for Malpeque said, and I quote, “This is not just about money”.

Ontario, as we will recall, had the Walkerton problem under a Conservative government. In the last election, my constituents were asking me about the problem with listeriosis, about food inspection and the cutbacks.

We had people lose their lives. Canadians lost their lives.

Can the member please comment on that for my constituents in the greater city of Toronto, who are just as important as somebody living on the farm? We respect the farm and agriculture, as I am sure they respect our auto industry.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Madam Speaker, to go back to my earlier remarks, I think that point was made when I quoted Scott Sinclair in an op-ed article written for the *Edmonton Journal*.

I will not go into it, but to summarize, that article said:

Recent outbreaks of food-borne illnesses...underline the dangers to the public of cutting back on government oversight and inspections in the food system.

Therefore, it is possible to cross over between the two.

The Wheat Board, which is a wonderful marketing agency that always maximizes returns to primary producers in this country, said:

With respect to inward inspection, the bill as it presently exists is a worst case scenario for western Canadian grain producers....

That is where the Wheat Board is at.

Will the government just please listen? Maybe it could support this hoist motion as well.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to ask this member what message he is going to give to Canadians and to producers. I have heard him twice today say that he is postponing the bill, when in fact he is defeating the legislation.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Madam Speaker, I do not believe I said we are postponing the bill. This hoist motion will kill the bill. It will get rid of it. It moves it off the table, and that is what we want to do.

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, NDP): Madam Speaker, the attack on grain farmers has been renewed, unfortunately. Amendments to the Canada Grain Act signal a renewal of the Conservative government's attack on grain farmers in Canada. Even worse, or equally as bad, as well as an attack on grain farmers, it is an attack on the role of government itself in protecting the health, the safety and the jobs of Canadians across the west and in Thunder Bay, where we stand to lose 100 well-trained high-quality grain inspectors.

Instead of helping Canada's grain producers in these troubled economic times, these amendments to the Canada Grain Act in Bill C-13 would do the following things.

They would shift the purpose of the grain act away from protecting producer interests. They would expose those producers to financial harm by eliminating the requirement for grain buyers to post security bonds to protect them in the case of bankruptcy or default. They would dismantle the Grain Appeal Tribunal, which protects producers from unscrupulous behaviour on the part of large multinational grain companies. They would eliminate the commission services that independently determine the quality and quantity of grain delivered, returning producers to the position of not knowing if they are receiving fair payment for a superior Canadian product.

As I have said, it will eliminate 200 highly trained, highly skilled grain inspectors, 100 of whom are in my riding of Thunder Bay.

These changes will hurt grain producers just like the Conservatives' effort to strip away farmer control of the Canadian Wheat Board in general. They also threaten the quality advantage of Canadian producers that they enjoy over competitors from around the world.

Government Orders

Bill C-13 will replicate the changes to the Canada Grain Act that were scorned by the opposition parties during the last Parliament. Not only NDP, but Liberal and Bloc MPs were united in recognizing the threat in a similar bill in the previous Parliament.

The Canadian Grain Commission is a pillar of our Canadian grain economy and it stands threatened by Conservative Party policies and Conservative Party politics. Why is this?

As a little background on the Canadian Grain Commission, the Grain Commission has served as an independent arbiter working to settle disputes when they arise about the quality and quantity of grain that producers are bringing to market. Typically this function protects producers and makes sure they are fairly paid by the powerful multinational corporations that buy and export their grain products.

Canada's reputation for top-quality grain is protected by those grain inspection services provided by the Canadian Grain Commission. The commission also provides independent, objective, comprehensive information about the quality and quantity of Canadian grain that is crucial to the international marketing efforts of the Canadian Wheat Board.

The Conservative Party's proposal in this bill would dramatically diminish the Canadian Grain Commission by doing the following.

It would kill the commission's inspection and weighing service, leaving producers disadvantaged in their dealings with grain companies when it comes to determining grain weight and grade. With the loss of the commission's weighing and grading service, producers sometimes may not be paid for the quantity and quality of grain they deliver. It would eliminate the requirement for grain buyers to post security bonds, thus exposing grain producers to financial harm in the event of a grain buyer bankruptcy or refusal to pay. It would dismantle the Grain Appeal Tribunal, which protects producers and the Canadian Wheat Board from unscrupulous behaviour on the part of grain companies.

• (1300)

The Conservative proposal poses a risk to Canada's international reputation in the grain trade, a well-earned and long-earned reputation on the world stage.

Our grain is in demand because no other country offers a quality guarantee, backed by a system of government inspection as stringent and comprehensive as that in Canada. To protect our quality brand, Canada even has programs and procedures to prevent Canadian grain from being mixed with imported U.S. product, ensuring the integrity of Canada's quality guarantee.

Along with Canada's international reputation as a producer of the highest quality, at risk is the quality premium paid to Canadian producers under the current system. Once this quality incentive to ship Canadian grain separate from American grain is lost, we expect, and Canadian producers and farmers expect, that Canadian grain will be shipped overland, mixed with lower quality American product and shipped through U.S. ports. That will have significant downstream consequences for the Canadian economy as the lucrative business of shipping Canadian grain is lost from Canadian ports.

Further, the Conservative proposal ignores the unanimous advice of an all-party committee of our House of Commons. After extensive study of the future of the Canadian Grain Commission, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food made several recommendations that were supported by all parties, including some Conservatives, but the agriculture minister chose to ignore the advice of the standing committee.

A previous speaker mentioned that they believe they have the support of western farmers. They certainly do not have the support of the National Farmers Union. The president of the National Farmers Union, from Saskatchewan, commented on the bill in a press release that stated:

Bill C-13, An Act to amend the Canada Grain Act, will cost farmers tens of millions of dollars annually, while jeopardizing food safety and the quality standards of Canada's grain exports. "The full implications of this bill are enormous"...The changes that are lurking beneath the surface are not readily apparent but they will be devastating to Canada's grain farmers.

..."This bill must not be allowed to pass."

The bill will add...millions of dollars of extra costs to farmers...farmers will have to spend their own money to replace the destruction of independent testing by the Grain Commission. Regardless of the extra money spent by farmers, the tests will still not be seen to be independent and unbiased [as they are today]. Regardless of whether it's the Canadian Wheat Board that does the test or a contracted private testing company, the testing results will not have the credibility or standing that the current Canadian Grain Commission test has.

Bill C-13 is aimed at deregulating the grain industry, and would fundamentally change the mandate of the Canadian Grain Commission (CGC)... "It removes the requirement that the CGC operate as a public interest watchdog that regulates the overall grain industry in the 'interests of producers'. Instead, it changes the CGC's role to become a passive service provider that provides grading, weighing and inspection services to grain companies on a fee-for-service basis. Farmers' protections will be reduced to a minimum, with plenty of loopholes for companies [who buy their grains] to circumvent those limited protections [that would be put in place].

Bill C-13 will eliminate inward inspection and weighing of grain, thereby undercutting the CGC's ability to maintain high-quality standards, and putting grain farmers and consumers at risk.

Bill C-13 would also eliminate the requirement that grain companies be licensed and bonded. Eliminating these security provisions would leave farmers holding the bag if a grain company goes bankrupt..."Eliminating this provision will not save farmers any money. It will only increase their risk."

• (1305)

The Conservative government and the Conservative Party are determined to weaken and destroy the Canadian Grain Commission. It is part of the Conservative agenda to put big business interests ahead of economic autonomy for Canadians and Canadian farmers.

Bill C-13 turns back the clock to the late 1800s. It puts us into self-regulation, as before 1912.

The Conservative agenda is clear. It is building on the Mulroney tradition of what is good for U.S. business will be good for Canada, selling out Canadian farmers, selling out Canada's grassroots industries, or grain-roots industries, and selling out Canadian workers across Canada, such as those in Thunder Bay.

Government Orders

Bill C-13 would put big business interests over the public interest and the interests of Canadian workers and Canadian citizens.

• (1310)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative members might think this debate is a joke. All they are able to do is to pretend again and again that they have all the answers and that the farmers, who have been writing us with grave and serious concerns about this bill, are completely out to lunch. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The government right now is praising the role of regulations and protecting the Canadian finances and banking sector, the same government which, on the environmental side of things, has brought forward a whole raft of bills and proposals. Now on the grain quality side of things, it is talking about ruining and taking back the regulations that protect the quality of Canadian grain.

Farmers in my region count on the grain that is supplied by the prairies and from across Manitoba, Ontario and such. They know that Canadian grain absolutely has the best reputation in the world, for a reason. It is not by some happenstance, not because the invisible hand of the market decided it, but because we have some rules in place that allow for the best quality grains to be produced in our country.

The government proposes a stripping away of those rules. It makes no sense to consumer safety, to the protection of producers, who need to have that reputation in hand when they sell their grains around the world, to have these rules taken away.

The government talks about how great regulations are in the banking sector. The Conservatives argued against this for decades, at every opportunity. Now it is born again to the idea that regulations on some things are important, but regulations for grain farmers are not. This seems wrong.

Could my hon. colleague comment on that?

Mr. Bruce Hyer: Mr. Speaker, to reiterate the essence of the concluding part of my remarks, I am disturbed at this attack on Canadian grain producers, but I am really even more concerned about a growing trend, a growing repetition, a growing mantra that less government is better, no government is best, if it moves, privatize it and privatize it until it does not move any more or it moves to a foreign country.

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have just heard what the discussion and the hoist motion are really about. It is about union jobs. We have heard the question asked on that. The member talked about jobs in his constituency, and that is important. I feel deeply for anybody losing a job, but the issue is that right now when farmers, including myself, ship our grain, we are the ones paying for those jobs.

Some of those jobs we need. We need some inspectors. We need people to do jobs as grain moves through the system. However, some of those people are doing work that simply is not necessary to have done. The bill streamlines that system so it will work more efficiently for farmers.

I depend on this system to market my grain. I have 3,000 acres of grain farms, which I rent out on a crop-share, so I have my share of that grain to market.

The comments of those members that government MPs are simply selling out farmers are so ludicrous that it is almost contemptible. In fact, many of us are involved in farms and all of us represent most of the farmers in our country. The last thing we will do is sellout our farmers.

Will the member admit that this is really what it is about and that it has nothing to do with what is good for farmers? Farmers are the people who we are protecting.

• (1315)

Mr. Bruce Hyer: Mr. Speaker, what I will admit is I am not a farmer. I and others have to rely on the emails, phone calls and the personal visits we have received from farmers' associations, farmers and union members, such as in Thunder Bay, who have good jobs, protecting the health, safety and quality of Canadian grain. That is something of which I am proud.

We know the Conservatives do not have respect for union labour and that they would like to subvert unions in Canada. However, some of us believe that quality, long-lasting, stable, well-paid jobs for professionals, those who protect us in the world markets and create economic benefit for Canada in places like my riding in Thunder Bay, is a good thing to have. I will not apologize for that.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague gave a fine speech and I thank the member for British Columbia Southern Interior for introducing the hoist motion. He has done incredible work, ascertaining the feelings of farmers about this legislation and bringing their concerns to this place and, in fact, being a voice for the voiceless in the face of a government that is determined to put the best interests of farmers aside.

The member for Vegreville—Wainwright throws out this innuendo and casts aspersions on our motives, but he misses the point by suggesting that all we are here to do is defend the unions. What he fails to acknowledge is that farmers, trade unionists and ordinary Canadians came together in the dirty thirties in an economic climate very much like we see today. People were struggling to survive in the face of big industry, in the face of multinational corporations and in the face of big banks that were unyielding in their responsiveness to ordinary Canadians.

Could the member tell the Conservatives, again, why it is so important for us to stand up for farmers and to ensure that we do not do anything that jeopardizes farm incomes and food safety?

Mr. Bruce Hyer: Mr. Speaker, it is important to protect farmers. It is particularly important to protect the smaller farmers. They are the ones who are telling me and others that they are quite concerned about the implications of the bill.

Government Orders

Even more important than that, is for us to protect the Canadian brand, Canadian history and the fact that Canada is still today a real country with a semi-autonomous economy and a decreasingly autonomous economic, foreign and agricultural policy.

I am in the House of Commons because I want to stand up for Canada and for Canadian autonomy in these areas. A large part of that is standing up for farmers with smaller operations who have asked us to speak for them.

Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, I am very proud to be on this side of the House representing farmers, trying to bring legislation forward that has been stuck in the mud for 30 years. I am proud to stand by the minister who is a farmer and understands these roles. I am proud to stand by members, like the member for Vegreville—Wainwright and the member for Wild Rose, to name a few, who stand up for farmers on a regular basis.

It is important to note that I was just in an agriculture committee meeting where we were standing up for small farm operations on the potato problem. The NDP did not even take the time to send a member to the committee to ask questions on that file.

In the last Parliament I was here when we introduced changes to KVD, kernel visual distinguishability. The NDP stood and said that we could not do this, that we were attacking farmers, that we were this, that and the other thing.

Farmers came to the agriculture committee last week and thanked us for introducing this. They thanked the minister for having the courage to move forward on this because they had more varieties of winter wheat now than they did last year because of that legislation.

Does the member, who might not have seen a farm before, think this legislation will in some way help modernize the Canada Grain Act?

• (1320)

Mr. Bruce Hyer: Mr. Speaker, I am not only not a farmer, I am not a grain inspector. However, I know that KVD inspections are complicated and are changing. We need well-paid long-term stable professionals doing that kind of analysis to maintain our position in world markets.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the reason I am speaking to Bill C-13 is because I am very worried about the number of times the government has put Canadians at risk by reducing inspections in previous instances.

We remember the listeriosis crisis, where there were problems with 200 brands of meat. There were 20 deaths in Canada and 5,000 Canadians were affected. We also remember that in China, 300,000 people were affected by melamine.

We cannot cut inspections. Cutting inspections were related to the problems of listeriosis. Inspectors were told that they should be in the office. That is like telling the lifeguard, where we send our small children, to do his inspections from his office. It just does not work. Canadians are very concerned about it, which is why the hoist motion is before us. To reduce safety is one element of the bill, but to reduce Canada's reputation around the world is another element. Canada would incur economic losses because of that. As the previous member said, these are the comments we have received

from farmers and farm organizations. They are not coming out of the blue.

We have a tremendous reputation around the world, to which I am sure some of the members on the other side would attest. When we look at the tremendous accomplishments of our agriculture and agri-food industry over the last hundred years, the Canadian grain sector stands out as a great success story.

Today, Canadian wheat, barley and other grains are known by our customers all over the world for their outstanding quality, consistency, cleanliness and innovation. Each and every year Canada's grain industry contributes over \$10 billion to the Canadian economy. These dollars drive the economies of both rural and urban areas of Canada. They create and sustain jobs right through the grain production chain, from farm input suppliers, to elevators, to transporters and processors. These dollars create jobs and prosperity for Canadians at home and they support our rural areas, which contribute so much to Canada's economy.

Why in the world would we threaten our worldwide reputation with this bill? That is the concerns of farmers and farm organizations.

I will explain the transport of grain and the process of some of the prairie grains. It starts with the farmer. Often it goes to local elevators or elevators at the shipping area. When the grain arrives, it is given the inward inspection. Then it is put on the ship to go overseas. A farmer needs to have a mandatory export permit, so it has to be inspected at some time, and that is the outward inspection. This leads to the distribution of the tremendously high quality of grains around the world. Individual farmers with particularly high quality grain can receive high prices for their product. The system has for decades resulted in our tremendous safety record.

In that process, the farmers give their grains to big producers to sell. A grain shipment can be worth quarter of a million dollars. That is basically the farmer's livelihood. He might have to sell the farm and his house if, for some reason, that were lost or he did not have access to it. Therefore, a bonding system is in place. Payment for the grain shipment is therefore protected if the big producer either goes bankrupt or for some reason refuses to pay. The system has been working very well in those respects. There could be some fine tweaking, but we do not fine tweak a fragile Christmas ornament with a sledge hammer.

First, what would happen if we eliminated the bonding?

• (1325)

I want Conservative members to imagine giving their houses to a business or someone else for a couple of months and having to wait some time to get paid. Would they put their livelihoods, houses and everything they own into someone else's trust if they did not have protection? That is the same type of situation these grain farmers are now going to be in.

Government Orders

Eliminating the protection farmers have is particularly cogent in this time of recession, which, hopefully, government members would agree, puts that particular aspect of this bill in a different scenario. In this time of recession, as banks will attest, there are more bankruptcies, more inability to pay and more inability to sell products. To threaten the little guy's entire livelihood, his farm, his existence and his house by this type of accident that is prevented now and would be lost by this bill would be thought of as unconscionable by anyone in the House. This is only one example.

When the template for this bill was developed last year, the government did not follow the committee recommendations. It is shameful. When the minister spoke on the last iteration of the bill, he said, "This was what the committee recommended". There are all sorts of instances in the bill where the government ignored the committee. I think the words in *Hansard* were that it showed contempt for the committee in not following the committee recommendations.

Bonding is a perfect example. The committee asked the government to study various possibilities of protecting farmers before it made any changes. Lo and behold, there was no study and no idea for protection. It just went ahead and did it, ignoring the committee's recommendation.

Removing the inward inspections would mean that Canadian grain exports to the United States may not be inspected at all, unless someone hires an inspector. Of course, this could have devastating effects both to the safety of Canadians and Americans but also to the export markets. What happens if, through this lack of inspection, a poor quality shipment goes to the United States? If we mix shipments of grain so there is no discrimination like there used to be between our high quality shipments and the lower quality shipments of the United States, we would not get high prices for that. That is the first problem.

As for the exports, those shipments must be inspected because it is mandatory by the international agreements Canada signed. What could happen is that one inspection, sometimes because of the details of analyzing the inspection results, might not occur until the ship has left the dock. What would happen when there are hundreds of thousands, if not millions of dollars worth of grain from many farmers on a ship? Does the ship have to return? It depends upon the type of contamination, which I will talk about later. Would the entire shipment need to be destroyed at a cost to everyone involved? All of these things would have been prevented or was far more likely to be prevented under the old system with inward inspection.

When the inspection occurs on grain coming into ports or into the local grain elevator in smaller quantities, people find out whether there is mould, glass, deer droppings or items that would make people very sick. This has some distinct advantages not only of finding it earlier and not needing to destroy hundreds of thousands or millions of dollars worth of product and finding it later mixed in a massive shipload but it also helps solve the problem for the future by protecting the grain that is not contaminated so it can be determined in a much smaller quantity where the particular shipment came from, which farm, which elevator, isolate the problem and then deal with it on a much smaller scale.

● (1330)

With government assistance, we can aggregate the various qualities so that a farmer with a particularly high quality of grain can get a premium price. The grain would not get mixed in and become indistinguishable in a package with a lower quality evaluation.

What could be uncovered in these type of inspections? For people who do not deal with grain directly, a number of things can get into grain. It is not so simple that the grain is always perfectly clean. In one year, 10% to 25% of the grain samples inspected had some problems. There could be 200 deer or some other animals in a field of grain. There could be rodent excrement or fertilizer pellets mixed in it. Other things that have been found are toxins, bacteria and fungi, fusarium blight, mercury, glass and ergot. Ergot is a particular example of how most people do not think wheat can be dangerous. Small quantities in bread can lead to violent muscle spasms, hallucinations and crawling sensations on the skin. It was thought that the Salem witch trials were caused because of ergot. So there can be very dangerous things in wheat that are dangerous to human health, dangerous to Canadians and Americans, and dangerous to our exports overseas. Far less important than health is the damage to our reputation if these are lost because of a lack of inspection.

The bill would lead to a lot less research by the Canadian Grain Commission. We have talked already in this Parliament incessantly about the cutting of researchers by the government. I have talked a number of times about the north's atmospheric research that has been cut close to the North Pole at the weather station. The three largest research councils in Canada have been cut as far as money for researchers. This small item is symptomatic of that. The reason we are world leaders is because we have this tremendous research capacity and the infestation labs. It is amazing that we would think of passing a bill that would cut off this great success story.

I also want to talk about another protection for farmers. At the beginning of the bill, it changes the function of the bill as to who is being protected. It suggests that it would not only protect the farmers and producers, but that it would throughout the system. The farmers' organizations have said that this would dilute the protection of the farmers themselves. I have mentioned already in a number of cases of how the small farmer, the small producer is being put at great risk by the bill, at unnecessary risk to the value and safety of his crop and to the safety of an amount of pay for his crop that could lead basically to his life savings.

Government Orders

•(1335)

Another item that would reduce the safety for farmers is the cutting back of the Grain Appeal Tribunal. When a farmer had an objection or wanted to challenge the Grain Commission inspector's report, he could appeal to the Grain Appeal Tribunal. If this bill were to proceed, this tribunal would be gone and the farmer's only recourse would be the chief grain inspector, one person. As we have noticed with the Wheat Board machinations, et cetera, that one person may actually have the Conservative government's interests at heart. In any event, I do not think any of us would want to put our entire livelihood, our family home and the family farm, at the risk of only one person. Even one person could make an innocent mistake. Also, farmers could no longer go to court. What type of natural justice would ever prevent someone from going to court, especially when the tribunal that he or she could have gone to previously has been eliminated? I do not think the farmers who have contacted our party are very happy about this lack of protection.

I want to talk a bit about some of the recommendations made by the committee.

In February 2008, during the debate on the last round of this bill, the minister said that many of the amendments to this act had come out of the work that was done at the agriculture committee, in co-operation with all parties, and that he looked forward to their support on this bill. He said that the amendments reflected the direction of both the COMPAS report and the good work done by the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food. I think nothing could be, I will not say more untruthful, but more deceiving, because, as I said earlier, many of the committee's recommendations were not followed.

What is really incomprehensible is that the person who chaired putting the report forward at the time was the Minister of Agriculture. He signed his name to a committee report that has all sorts of recommendations, some of which I mentioned and more of which I will mention until I run out of time, and then introduces a bill that does not follow those recommendations. What is even worse is that members of his party said in their speeches that the bill came from the recommendations and that one of the recommendations was that there should be a cost benefit analysis done about privatizing the inspection services before anything like that was considered. However, that was never done.

The committee, as I said earlier, suggested that before bonds were eliminated, a study be done and a report sent back to the committee on various models. It also suggested that the Grain Commission be given more money to do these types of investigations on the streamlining, not less money.

With regard to the 200 job losses, it is not just the jobs themselves. Every member here knows how bad that is but when we equate that to reduced inspections on food safety, for hundreds of thousands of people that makes it much more serious.

Because of the problems related to the lesser quality of the shipments, as I suggested earlier, those in the transport business will know there could be losses to Canadian ports. The agriculture union estimates that the protection programs that protect farmers would be

slashed by 67%, the grain quality by almost 50% and the research programs by 70%.

I do not know if people realize the ramifications of this bill. For all the reasons I mentioned, it is definitely time to send this bill back to the drawing board.

•(1340)

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I must say it has been a really interesting morning. Of course, I am a member of the agriculture committee. We were in agriculture committee talking to some farmers from Alberta and Quebec. I would have thought that the member for British Columbia Southern Interior, and being from a potato province, the member for Malpeque would have had an interest in potato topics, but of course, now I have found out that they have been here in the House messing around with the grain industry out in western Canada.

It is disappointing for me to stand here today. This is a bill that we talked about. Two years ago in committee, we came up with a unanimous report on how to go forward. Out of that committee report came legislation, which is what we see today. We know it is not perfect and the minister himself has said it is not perfect. It probably needs some refining and some work in committee. I was under the impression that all the opposition parties were in agreement with that and they thought that this would be a wise thing to do.

My colleague talked about bonding. What does he say to the small businessman who now has to buy an expensive bond? What does he say to the farmer who thought he was protected under the existing bonding system, yet when he goes to collect his cheque, he finds out it is only half of what he thought it would be? Does he think that is the way the system should be?

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, it is interesting to suggest that the farmer would be upset if he only gets half of what he should when we have a bill that would make sure he gets zero of what he should. I think the farmer would have preferred to get half.

The member talked about the small businessman being protected by the bond and that we are going to tell him that he has to buy a bond. It is not he who has to buy a bond; it is the big grain producers that have the little farmer's grain and might lose it, go bankrupt or refuse to pay totally by accident, and then that farmer is at risk.

The member made the excellent point about all the parties agreeing at committee. They came up with some excellent recommendations. I mentioned a number of them. The bill went totally against them and did not follow them. He would have been exactly right if he had made that statement a year and a half ago, or whenever the committee made the recommendations. The committee members were in agreement. They signed a report and then the chair of the committee who signed the report became the minister and brought forward a bill that had no resemblance at all to the recommendations in the report.

Government Orders

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I just heard a reference from my hon. colleague on the agriculture committee that I was not there this morning. I was here debating this very important bill. At some point in time, I would like to ask him if he is doing any work to help the potato farmers.

I have a letter on my desk asking the minister to help. I met Mr. Gemme, who wrote the letter to me. I talked with the folks at committee during the latter half. I think all of our parties will get together to work on this. Hopefully, the minister will help these folks in Quebec and Alberta.

I am envious that my hon. colleague from Yukon is going back to beautiful Yukon. I spent years there and I encourage all members to visit that beautiful part of the country.

Could he place Bill C-13 in a global context? In other words, if this bill were to pass, what ramifications would he see for Canadian farmers and for Canada?

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, I do agree with the member that I have the most beautiful riding in the country.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Almost.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, the riding of the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley may be in second place.

The member has raised a very important and serious question. As I mentioned in the beginning and as everyone in the House would agree, we have a worldwide reputation for the highest quality grains. If these items are dumped into a shipload that is going around the world, that has at least two important aspects. It has a human security aspect. People around the world who make high quality foods from grain pick the high-quality and high-priced Canadian product because they know it is going to be high quality. Our farmers, grain companies and transporters all benefit. Why would we ever want to damage this by taking away inspectors?

Because of GATT and international trade rules, there are very few things we can do any more to help our farmers in their tremendous competition with Europe and the United States. It subsidizes so much. When we have something here that is not being challenged, why would we eliminate that particular advantage? Why would we put the health of people anywhere in the world at risk?

Finally, in the United States, which is so security conscious, removing that inward inspection of United States shipments may cut us right off if there was an incident. We would lose huge exports.

• (1345)

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think maybe the member has come here without really understanding the bill. Obviously, we have seen some strange activity on the other side today.

Is he aware that with the changes, farmers would still get their grain inspected at the elevators, as they do now? Does he know that the grain would be inspected at port, as it is now? Does he know that inward weighing is actually costing farmers money and if we made these changes, it would be saving the producers money? Does he know those things?

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I already said it would be inspected at port at a time which, in some case, would be too late. It may still get inspected, but it may have to be privatized and it could cost them even more. What the hon. member is recommending could be done, but it would likely cost the farmers even more and it would not be mandatory. This bill makes it less mandatory. For some farmers, because of a problem with another ship load that was not determined for the reasons I mentioned, or the various contaminants, which the Conservatives know could occur in grains, or all the problems which I could go over again, it could cause those farmers unnecessary losses.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Speaker, it is interesting to listen to this debate. It shows the lack of understanding of the opposition parties in how things work in the grain system.

I get concerned because my constituents are farmers. They are my friends and neighbours. They do not want to be driving around in a 40-year-old half-ton. We are trying to modernize this half-ton; we are trying to modernize the grain act.

Why will the hon. member not allow this bill to go to committee and make the modifications there?

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, I would like to use a different comparison. The hon. member talked about a 40-year-old half-ton. Let us talk about airplanes and if we were to take away the inspection of airplanes. Of course, we want to get new airplanes, but it does not mean that we would stop inspecting them for safety periodically. Why, in modernizing, would that lead to not inspecting the airplanes? Why would modernization reduce the inspections on the food that we are eating?

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Speaker, I am still amazed at the member's lack of understanding of this issue. Maybe it is because he is not from a grain growing area. I assume that is why. I have heard a number of statements from people who are completely ignorant about what they are talking about this morning.

It is time, as the member for Prince Albert just said, to modernize this system so that it begins to work far better for farmers and producers so they can get their grain to market, get paid a decent price for it and there are not all kinds of deductions and payments coming off of their grain. This bill will do that. Farmers will still get their grain inspected as they do when they deliver it, the grain will be inspected at port when it is being exported, as it is right now and the whole process will cost them less.

Why is the member against that?

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, it is too bad the member is saying that the National Farmers Union which drew attention to these problems does not know what it is talking about.

Government Orders

He will have to read the transcript of my speech to see what the problems are with the changes that remove the inspections. That could increase the chances of bad food going overseas in exports. It could ruin our reputation and the chances of those farmers who have a high-quality shipment of getting a better price for it. It could ruin the possibility of a security problem with the United States and that could devastate the revenues that our farmers get from exports to the United States.

• (1350)

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to participate in this debate to add my voice as a member who comes from a city riding. I stood up earlier to express that. Some people might ask why a member from the city of Toronto, the former city of Scarborough, would stand up to show concern about farm issues. We consume just as much as the people who live in Alberta or anywhere else.

Mr. Speaker, before I go on, I want to point out that I will be sharing my time with my good friend and colleague, the member for Don Valley East, who is also a neighbour of my riding and an urbanite. It just goes to show the value members from urban ridings such as Don Valley East, Scarborough Centre and everywhere else place on farm issues.

In saying so, I want to put on the record that it was Dennis Mills, a former member of Parliament from Toronto, who initiated the recognition of the family farm. With that initiative he wanted to make all Canadians no matter where they lived aware of the importance of the family farm, primarily because we value the good work and participation that different parts of the country contribute not just to the food supply here in Canada, but in terms of exports which create revenue for our country, job opportunities and so on.

I sit on the international trade committee. Today in our committee we had representatives from another sector of the food supply, the Canadian Pork Council, the Canadian Beef Export Federation, and the Canadian Cattlemen's Association. We listened with great interest to what they had to say. They were not talking about grain, but they were talking about essentially the same thing, what we consume as Canadians and what we sell abroad.

On this specific bill, I sought the counsel of my hon. colleague, a former minister of agriculture, the member for Malpeque, who, I would say, is an individual who knows this file very well. As a member from a city riding, I usually go to the source and he briefed me on the bill. He summarized the bill for me. I would like to put it on the record.

The purpose of the initiative is to eliminate inspections and weighing of grain shipments and bonding, which is a type of insurance for farmers in case of bankruptcy by shippers of grains. The changes in this legislation look to reduce costs in the sale and transportation of grain but may add risks to the farmer.

I think everyone agrees that no system is perfect, so what we try to do is make changes. In the last Parliament the former minister of agriculture had a plebiscite. That plebiscite was put into question. It went before the courts and it was thrown out. The farmers wanted their input and they should have their input democratically, and they did.

I do not know why the government is trying to shove this legislation down people's throats. In asking a question of the member for Malpeque, I mentioned that I was concerned because he talked about it not just being about money. Right away, it prompted my concern on behalf of my constituents, on behalf of residents of the province I come from, Ontario. It reminded me right away of Walkerton which occurred under a Conservative government, the Mike Harris government specifically. We all know what happened. Inspections were cut back and inspectors were not available. People lost their lives. During the last election, there was an outbreak of listeriosis. Unfortunately, again some Canadians lost their lives. That had to do with changes to how inspections took place. As we all know, funding was reduced.

How much is a life worth? Is it worth saving the salary of an inspector or two? I do not think so.

• (1355)

We have built a society here in Canada which is often described as second to none, and our contributions are part of this civil society, through taxation or levies, which we then put back into the system to make sure that proper inspection, for example, is being done, monitoring is being done, and the right kinds of professionals are being hired, so that we feel comfortable when we go out to the grocery store.

Earlier today I spoke to the representatives I mentioned earlier. I said that my concern is that I can go to the local store and buy my steak, minced meat or bacon to feed myself and my family, and I am at ease. Similarly, all other products that come from our farming community should be put in that category as well.

My concern here with this legislation, as the member for Malpeque said, is that there are some glitches in it, some bugs that need to be addressed. If anybody has come forth with recommendations, it is the member for Malpeque. I was hoping that the Conservative Party would open up and listen.

Today, for example, we are trying to address the various concerns that the Canadian Pork Council is having, the beef producers are having, the cattlemen are having in sending their products primarily to one of our biggest markets, the United States of America, in terms of the type of inspections that are going on.

What we are going to be undertaking is to go down there, at some point in time, talk to our counterparts and make the Americans aware of what we are doing here in Canada. For example, members will recall when we had the BSE issue. We were basing our argument on science and the Americans unfortunately were basing theirs on vested interest, which was unfair.

It was similar to the softwood lumber issue where we knew we had a good product. We invested in our mills. We modernized them and were able to put out cost effective products, yet again, we got these appeals that took place through the NAFTA or the WTO, and X amount of money was being put forward to challenge or respond to the challenges. The next thing we know, farmers, for example, end up picking up the burden. It is similar to what our witnesses were saying today before our committee.

Statements by Members

What was also disappointing with respect to our witnesses today at the international trade committee was that they felt that the government was not adequately supporting them financially so that they could be better equipped to market Canadian products internationally. When they referred to the types of numbers that they were given, they were so minute compared to other areas in other countries. It is no wonder that even though we have the best beef, for example, in the world, we are not able to get out and get our fair share of the market.

I would like to tell members about an incident that took place some years ago when we were going through the difficulties with respect to our beef products. Producers were invited into my riding and we had a barbecue. We invited constituents who really wanted to know what this issue was all about.

As my good friend, the member for Don Valley East said, we are urbanites but we care. We care first, and yes, we consume, so we invited the residents of our urban ridings, and they came out and spoke to the producers and the farmers. They were updated. They were educated. They were informed and they had a sympathetic ear. What happened? All of a sudden they were on board to send letters and provide their input and suggestions.

At the same time, we went to our schools and talked to young students, who hopefully will be tomorrow's representatives sitting here in my seat talking about important issues to Canada.

●(1400)

No riding or area, I said before and I will say it again, has a monopoly on it. The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food I see is sitting in his chair and he is paying very close attention to what I am saying. He knows this very well that he does not have a monopoly on agriculture.

The Speaker: Order. When the debate resumes, the hon. member will have five minutes for questions and comments consequent on his speech.

Statements by members.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

ACTS OF BRAVERY

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize a remarkable constituent in my riding of South Shore—St. Margaret's. Captain Carl Vernon Atkinson of West Head, Cape Sable Island, has worked 50 years as a fishing captain.

During this time, Mr. Atkinson's bravery saved the lives of fellow fishermen on four separate occasions. During rough seas in the spring of 1953, he risked his own boat and crew to save a three-man crew and the boat that had foundered.

In 1955 he steered his boat between two breakers during rough seas to save the captain of an overturned boat in one of the most daring rescues every seen on the South Shore.

In 1960, while other boats remained in port due to gale force winds, Mr. Atkinson left Clark's Harbour to rescue two men in medical distress.

Finally, during a massive storm in 1968, he rescued two men whose boat had been shipwrecked.

It is an honour to recognize Mr. Atkinson's bravery as well as his 50 years as a fishing captain on the South Shore.

* * *

WORLD AUTISM AWARENESS DAY

Mrs. Bonnie Crombie (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is World Autism Awareness Day, one of only three official disease-specific United Nations days. On this day, autism advocacy groups around the world are calling on their governments to take measures to raise awareness about autism, and to encourage early diagnosis and intervention.

As many of us are, I am proudly wearing the blue puzzle piece, the signature mark of Autism Speaks Canada, which symbolizes the three messages central to the autism community: compassion, inclusion and hope.

One in every 150 children is diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder, which makes it more prevalent than childhood cancer, diabetes and AIDS combined.

Canadian researchers are playing lead roles in many global research initiatives to help find the missing pieces of the autism puzzle. In the absence of a cure, early detection, diagnosis and interventions are key to successful outcomes.

I am proud that our Liberal leader has committed to Autism Speaks Canada in a letter, and I quote:

The Liberal Party strongly supports the initiative to develop a national strategy for autism to help provide better coordination of federal assistance and for continued research.

I encourage every—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Brome—Missisquoi.

* * *

[Translation]

THE GURIT COMPANY, MAGOG

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Gurit company located in Magog, which is in my riding of Brome—Missisquoi, manufactures structural foam for the wind energy industry and announced this week that it is laying off about half its employees, some 210 skilled workers. These job losses come on the heels of thousands of others in Magog's manufacturing sector since 2006.

President Obama has introduced assistance for the automotive industry on condition that they manufacture green cars. The federal government should follow suit and support green companies. I would like to point out that Gurit is the largest manufacturer in Magog and supplies clean energy companies in the wind sector.

Statements by Members

Once again, our companies are hindered by this government's inaction and lack of appropriate and green measures in support of the manufacturing sector. It has been dragging its feet for three years while we lose jobs.

* * *

[English]

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to make a statement on the ecoEnergy wind program.

The Canadian Wind Energy Association has been working to extend its very successful ecoEnergy program for renewable power. This program was to run until 2011, but it is clear that its huge success has meant that it has run out of money. This has created uncertainty for the wind energy industry here in Canada.

We need leadership here in Canada on wind energy. The government must commit to new funding for this power program. It will cost \$600 million to extend it for five years, but it would leverage over \$6 billion in new investments in Canadian wind energy and create 8,000 new jobs.

Other countries are now leading the way on renewable power and wind energy. An investment in the ecoEnergy program today will enable Canada to effectively—

● (1405)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Nanaimo—Alberni.

* * *

THEORY OF EVOLUTION

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Mr. Speaker, recently we saw an attempt to ridicule the presumed beliefs of a member of this House and the belief of millions of Canadians in a Creator. Certain individuals in the media and the scientific community have exposed their own arrogance and intolerance of beliefs contrary to their own.

Any scientist who declares that the theory of evolution is a fact has already abandoned the foundations of science. For science establishes fact through the study of things observable and reproducible. Since origins can neither be reproduced nor observed, they remain the realm of hypothesis.

In science, it is perfectly acceptable to make assumptions when we do not have all the facts, but it is never acceptable to forget our assumptions.

Given the modern evidence unavailable to Darwin, such as, advanced models of plate tectonics, polonium radiohalos, polystratic fossils, I am prepared to believe that Darwin would be willing to re-examine his assumptions.

The evolutionist may disagree, but neither can produce Darwin as a witness to prove his point. The evolutionist may genuinely see his ancestor in a monkey, but many modern scientists interpret the same evidence in favour of creation and a Creator.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Dr. Wang Bingzhang, founder of the overseas Chinese democracy movement, was kidnapped in Vietnam in 2002 and illegally abducted into China. Following a one-day closed door star chamber proceeding, where he had no right to speak and no evidence was presented against him, Dr. Wang was sentenced to life imprisonment.

Six years ago the United Nations determined that the charges were unfounded, and this Parliament adopted a motion calling for his release. Dr. Wang, now in his sixties, continues to languish in solitary confinement in a Chinese prison, where both his health and morale deteriorate with every passing day.

His Montreal born daughter, Ti-Anna Wang, is in Ottawa today to raise awareness about the plight of her father. Indeed, it was the freedom that Dr. Wang experienced as a medical student at McGill University that impelled him to forgo his promising medical career and to dedicate himself to the cause of Chinese democracy.

The imprisonment of Dr. Wang at this point is a form of ongoing torture. His original abduction, subsequent trial and continued detention are illegal. This unjust suffering must now end. Today we join Ti-Anna Wang in calling for his release from prison and reuniting with his family in Canada.

* * *

JUNO AWARDS

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the boys from Hanna, Alberta, constituents of mine, really rocked the place at this year's Juno Awards.

Since 1995, Chad, Mike and Brandon Kroeger and Ryan Peake, Daniel Adair and Ryan Vikedal have been known as Nickelback. These local boys have rocked and rolled around the world.

At the Juno Awards, they won Best Album, Best Group and the Fan Choice Award.

I encourage all members to get a copy of Nickelback's *Dark Horse* album, the best album in Canada in 2008.

With Alberta know-how and musical talent honed in a small town, these boys have been rocking since they were in middle school together. They are living the dream of many aspiring young musicians in Canada and around the world.

These Canadians have made us proud and entertained us over the years with their albums *All the Right Reasons*, *The Long Road*, *Silver Side Up* and the *State*.

We wish them all the best on their North American tour and through 2009.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

QUEBEC ADULT LEARNERS WEEK

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to acknowledge the seventh Quebec Adult Learners Week, an initiative of the Institut de coopération pour l'éducation des adultes.

Year after year, this non-profit organization promotes and highlights adult education, both formal and informal.

More than 500 activities have been planned for this week, including creative workshops, debates, exhibits, forums, open doors, cultural visits and more. I cannot help but warmly praise this initiative, which again attests to the enthusiasm and vibrancy of the Quebec nation.

I also cannot help but hope that this government will finally stop dithering and hand over as quickly as possible the money for workforce training promised to Quebec.

* * *

TAXATION

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday my colleague answered a question and the answer is vitally important to the Government of Quebec and Quebecers, concerning the harmonization of the QST with the federal tax.

Despite the evident chaos in the ranks of the Bloc, the minister repeated the truth for Quebecers of all political stripes.

Since the Quebec finance minister had stated that the QST was not harmonized and adjustments would be needed in this area in order to harmonize it, we have acted with true Conservative diligence, as true Quebecers.

We promised to negotiate in good faith with the Government of Quebec on this, and that we shall.

As for the improper labels being thrown at the Quebec members of government by the increasingly frustrated Bloc members, I would like to say that I too prefer to be at the service of my constituents rather than a token on-looker.

* * *

● (1410)

[English]

CANCER

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, cancer is a tragedy that affects too many Canadian families. On average, 3,200 Canadians are diagnosed every week with this terrible disease. Tragically, more than 1,400 Canadians will die from cancer this week.

Based on current incidence rates, 39% of Canadian women and 45% of Canadian men will develop cancer during their lifetimes. This means that every Canadian family will be affected by cancer.

Support of April as Daffodil Month will inform Canadians of what they can do to prevent cancer, fund excellent research on all types of

cancer, provide support to cancer patients and their families and provide information about cancer to all Canadians.

For the government wearing a daffodil is not enough. We call upon Conservatives to fund health research, put a stop to the illicit cigarettes and honour the Prime Minister's promise to ban the flavoured tobacco products affecting our children. The government must act now.

* * *

LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, imagine if a political party tells voters in B.C. that it does not want to help the auto industry, then in Ontario pretends it never has said such words. Imagine if a political party champions a job-killing carbon tax one day, then backs away from it the next. Imagine if a political party would say on the east coast that it supports the seal hunt, then back in Ottawa introduces a bill that would ban the seal hunt. Imagine if a political party went to one province and praised its natural resource industries, then went to another province and said that natural resources were basement industries.

It is actually not that hard to imagine, because they are the hypocritical views of the Liberal Party of Canada.

* * *

PINE BEETLE

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, at a time when the government lectures the world for not spending enough to help its economies, the Prime Minister, at a minimum, should apologize to the forestry communities of British Columbia devastated by the pine beetle.

Pine beetle funding promised to the damaged and devastated communities more than two and a half years ago was worth less than the paper on which the press release was printed. My communities are desperate for this help to turn around their economies and save their towns. They have asked for accountability time and again from the government, and nothing.

Rather than pretend it is willing to help our communities devastated by the pine beetle, the government must own up to its commitments, show up with the money and give up this pattern of deception.

* * *

WORLD AUTISM AWARENESS DAY

Mr. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today is World Autism Awareness Day. It is also now 11 years since my son Jaden was diagnosed with autism. So how can I in just one minute explain what it is like to deal with autism?

Jaden is now 13 and it has been a very difficult year for him. He is still an amazing kid, with an impact on people that I can only dream I will one day have. However, 13 years is a difficult time for any kid. It has been a particularly difficult time for Jaden, who is completely non-verbal. Jaden has an intense desire to be needed, to please anyone he comes into contact with, but this, combined with his difficulty communicating, has led to a paralyzing anxiety at times.

He is often unsure whether yes really means yes, and a no can cause a stream of literally unexplainable tears that are heartbreaking for all of us.

Families across the country deal with autism and issues like this every day. On this single day, we honour them for the selfless commitment they make to their loved ones every day of the year.

* * *

[Translation]

SRI LANKA

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in response to the conflict between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Tamil Eelam rebels, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights recently called for a suspension of hostilities to permit the evacuation of the civilian population and allow access to humanitarian aid.

Despite government designation of safe zones for civilians, repeated bombings have taken place in these zones. Over 2,800 civilians would have been killed, hundreds of them children. More than 7,000 people have been injured since January 20, many of them while in these so-called safe zones. Some 150,000 to 180,000 civilians are still trapped in a steadily shrinking area.

This violence must stop, and it is high time the Government of Canada urged the parties to sign a ceasefire agreement immediately and respond favourably to the demands of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

* * *

•(1415)

[English]

BATTLE OF VIMY RIDGE

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to mark the 92nd anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge.

In four days in April 1917, Canada's troops succeeded where our Allies had failed, ascending and capturing the ridge under fire. My grandfather's unit was among them.

[Translation]

By their sacrifice, those who fell at Vimy won the world's respect, and Canada took its place among the nations of the world. Let us never forget that this country was proud to give what it held most dear to protect the whole world.

[English]

When the cause is just and the world needs our help, Canada's answer has always been "ready, aye, ready".

Oral Questions

We honour the fallen of Vimy Ridge, and also of Passchendaele and Ypres, of the beaches of Normandy and, yes, of Kandahar.

We will keep faith with their valour and sacrifice. We will remember them.

* * *

LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Liberal Party voted in favour of an NDP climate change bill that would cripple our economy in the best of times, but will outright devastate it in the current global economic crisis.

This Liberal-NDP bill will put thousands of Canadians out of work and gut our manufacturing industry.

Sadly, this is the only idea ever offered up by the Liberal Party in response to Canada's serious economic challenges. The bill is as bad as the Liberals' job killing carbon tax. The bill is also a slap in the face to climate change approach put forward by both our government and the U.S. administration.

How low can the Liberals sink? Their willingness to again shack up with an NDP-Bloc coalition is a warning to all of us how shamefully desperate the Liberal Party is to get its hands on power. Canadians beware.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the economy, the Prime Minister says one thing outside the country and another inside to fellow Canadians.

On Fox News and CNN, he told other countries to boost their stimulus. In Canada, he said that we should not worry, that he has done enough already. Which is it? The other side can laugh but the basic story it is offering to Canadians is unravelling.

Does the government believe it has done enough for the Canadian economy?

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is an absolute false statement. The Prime Minister said the very same thing in this House as he said in London today, as has the finance minister. They have said that the stimulus that we have put in place, which is very substantial, is larger than most OECD countries and G7 countries. The Prime Minister again today reiterated, "If we need to do more, we will".

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in London, the Prime Minister also said, "So notwithstanding that the employment effects are...becoming very real on people, the worst aspects of instability...are behind us."". In plain English that means Canadians are losing their jobs and we are not doing anything more to help them.

Oral Questions

Why can the Prime Minister not speak plain English? Why can he not convey any understanding of what is happening to workers? Will he or will he not offer additional measures to help them?

• (1420)

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): And that was plain speak, was it, Mr. Speaker? I noticed that he had a little trouble getting that out.

The Prime Minister has been very clear that we put in place an economic action plan that was necessary for Canadians. Not only will it stimulate the economy but it will put money in place to retrain those who are unfortunate enough to lose their jobs.

We have extended EI by five weeks, which is very important for those who have lost their jobs. That will help bridge them through to where they can maybe find some new employment. That is critical to this government. Those people are important to us.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, hundreds of thousands of Canadians are going to lose their jobs in the coming year. Employment insurance is failing unemployed workers. The IMF has downgraded its forecasts, and the Bank of Canada is getting ready to do the same thing, yet this government is still saying it has done enough.

Is that this government's vision: more obstinate indifference?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada is going through tough economic times, and we have introduced measures to help people who are losing their jobs. One of those measures extends the employment insurance benefit period by five weeks. Unlike the parties that want benefits to start and end two weeks earlier, we are proposing to add five weeks at the end. This is important, because people who lose their jobs may take longer to find new jobs. Our decision means that someone who is receiving \$400 a week in employment insurance will get an additional \$2,000.

* * *

[*English*]

AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the head of women's affairs at the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission said that western silence had been "disastrous" for women's rights in Afghanistan. She went on to say something that is very pertinent. She said, "If they had got more involved in the process when it was discussed in parliament, we could have stopped it".

When was the government aware of the legislation being proposed with respect to women in Afghanistan and what did it do about it when it heard about it?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was in Afghanistan only about two or three weeks ago and the officials in Afghanistan, the people of Afghanistan were not even aware of this legislation coming at them.

We are very much aware of it and that is why the Prime Minister has taken a lead on the world stage by making it very clear that

Afghanistan must live up to its responsibility to protect human rights, especially the human rights of women. We have made this very clear. We know it is in that process now and we are holding it to that.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, maybe the government will finally take a lead on this next story.

Despite the concerns raised by several senior courts, including the Saudi King's own supreme council, that the case of Mohamed Kohail must be seen as a matter of self defence and not murder, a lower court has once again reaffirmed its sentence of death on Mr. Kohail, which may also imperil the life of his brother Sultan.

The Prime Minister is with the King of Saudi Arabia in London today. Will he finally act directly and raise this serious miscarriage of justice with King Abdullah? What will it take for him to act and show some leadership?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are deeply disappointed at the reports that a Saudi court has upheld its decision to sentence Mohamed Kohail to death. The Minister of Foreign Affairs has requested an official review of the Saudi court decision when it is issued.

Canada continues to express its concern for a fair and transparent review of the wording and the sentence. Since 2007, we have remained in regular contact with the Kohail family, including their lawyer.

* * *

[*Translation*]

G20

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has contradicted himself. He allows himself to lecture his counterparts at the G20 by asking them to do more to combat the economic crisis whereas, in this very Chamber, he has told us that he has done enough. And yet, the economy continues to falter. We need only think of the difficulties experienced by Abitibi-Bowater and Bombardier.

After missing the G20 official photo, the Prime Minister is going to miss the boat. What is this government going to do to deal with the economic crisis? Will it do more or less?

• (1425)

[*English*]

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have to reject the premise of that. I will quote from the IMF report. It states:

The mission supports the large, timely, and well-targeted fiscal stimulus in Budget 2009. The stimulus package is appropriately sized—well above the Fund's benchmark of 2 percent of GDP. It is also prudently based on a worse economic outlook than private sector forecasts.

How can anyone in the opposition say that we have not done enough?

Oral Questions

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the OECD has asked that more be done to provide income support for laid off workers. The five additional weeks of benefits for unemployed workers is a good measure, but most unemployed workers will not benefit from that. The waiting period, which translates into the first two weeks of benefits, must also be eliminated, and that measure would affect all unemployed workers.

Does the government realize that it has the opportunity with such a measure to help all unemployed workers and inject money into the economy?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the opposition member, the leader of the Bloc Québécois, does not understand that when we are in a difficult financial situation, it will take people longer to find a job or to return to the job they had before.

As an example, consider the layoffs announced today by Bombardier. What the Bloc is proposing is that people's benefits start two weeks earlier and end two weeks earlier. That is not what we want. We want to ensure that those who lose their jobs will receive EI benefits for a longer period. Instead of two weeks, we are giving five. Five weeks more means about \$2,000.

Mrs. Josée Beaudin (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Revenue is creating confusion by comparing the five extra weeks of benefits and the abolition of the waiting period. Abolition of the waiting period does not mean abandoning the addition of the five extra weeks. One measure does not cancel out the other, as the minister knows full well.

Instead of cultivating ambiguity, can the Minister of National Revenue not understand that the crisis is with us now and targeted measures, such as abolishing the waiting period, are needed now to help the unemployed while at the same time stimulating the economy?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, the hon. member would deprive those who lose their jobs, because they will be out of work longer in these times of economic difficulty. She wants to deprive them of five additional weeks of benefits. That is what they are proposing. They are proposing to start two weeks earlier and end two weeks earlier.

Not us. We are giving five extra weeks and it is important to do that at this point in time. That is the difference between their philosophy and ours. We do not want to impoverish people who lose their jobs, we want to help them longer.

Mrs. Josée Beaudin (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there are 295,000 fewer jobs since last October, and this morning Bombardier announced another 1,000 layoffs.

There are people behind those numbers, people in need, young families without incomes and with unpaid mortgages. Two weeks more benefits at the beginning can make all the difference.

Is the government aware that its inaction is making the crisis worse?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, do you know how long that two week waiting period has been in existence?

It has been around since 1971, some 38 years ago. When people take out insurance on their car or anything else they have a deductible, a waiting period.

They do not want to give anything more; they just want benefits to start two weeks earlier and end two weeks earlier. Not us. We want to give five extra weeks to those who lose their jobs. It is important when people lose their jobs to have the possibility of drawing five more weeks of benefits, and people agree with us on that.

* * *

[English]

AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the laws that President Karzai is bringing forward are devastating steps backward for women in Afghanistan. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has said that these laws are a "clear indication that the human rights situation in Afghanistan is getting worse, not better".

This latest assault on rights is not new. The House passed a unanimous motion to support Afghan journalist, Sayed Pervez Kambaksh, who received a life sentence because he wrote about women's rights. That is not what we are fighting for.

What concrete consequences will there be for—

● (1430)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International Trade.

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are very concerned about this situation, which is why, upon learning of it, the Minister of Foreign Affairs immediately called upon his counterparts to ask what they were intending to do.

The Prime Minister was one of the first world leaders to make a public statement of indignation on this subject. We are saying to the government in Afghanistan that it has certain obligations that are very clear under international treaties and that it must live up to those, and especially to protecting human rights, including the human rights of women. We are holding it to that.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the economy, it seems that the Prime Minister is always late. He was late to recognize the recession, late to recognize the job loss crisis, and was in denial about it, and he was even late for the photo op.

He also has a problem when it comes to saying one thing on the world stage and another one here in Canada.

Here is the latest example. The G20 rightly spoke out against tax havens and said that there needs to be action. However, the Conservative government, with the help of the Liberals, just loosened the rules for tax havens in its budget.

Oral Questions

Which Prime Minister should we believe: the one speaking at the G20 or the one taking action to the contrary here in Canada?

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the only ones late in this session are the NDP members. They still have not read the budget and probably have not yet read the declaration that Canada signed on to this morning. This is a G20 joint declaration which states that non-cooperative offshore tax havens will be named and shamed if they do not agree to international rules. Is that not clear enough, or should I take it over so he can read it?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, rather than take the economic crisis seriously, during the Prime Minister's visit to London, he had his picture taken with a soccer player and took tea with the Queen.

But back here, he is beating the Mulroney record for poor economic performance.

Nevertheless, as a percentage of the GDP, Canada is investing less to stimulate the economy than China, Germany, Australia, South Korea, South Africa, Russia or the United States. Why?

[*English*]

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, why on earth would he ask a question like that when in fact we took early pre-emptive action?

I will quote from something else that I assume the hon. member has not yet read. It is the 2007 fall economic statement. It is probably right underneath that budget in that stack of unread books. It reads:

Given this global economic uncertainty, now is the time to act. Our strong fiscal position provides Canada with an opportunity that few other countries have—to make broadbased tax reductions....

That is what we did but I think they voted against that too.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at the G20 the Prime Minister tries to curry favour with President Obama by saying everyone should do more to stimulate the economy. Here at home he tries to curry favour with his Conservative base by saying Canada has done plenty. Now it is true, he has been all over the map for months.

Does he really believe this juvenile attempt to mix his messages will fool either President Obama or his Conservative base here at home?

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member is failing to recognize the fact that there is only one party in this House of Commons that actually put forward a plan to deal with these difficult economic times. This is a worldwide recession, and as I just quoted, we took pre-emptive action starting as early as the fall 2007.

We waited, we waited, and we waited for the opposition to put forward a plan. We are still waiting.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are waiting, waiting and waiting for one dollar of their infrastructure money to get out the door.

In light of yesterday's photograph, maybe I should have said the G19 rather than the G20.

In any event, the Prime Minister switches from depression talk two months ago to Pollyanna talk two weeks ago, and today he said that he hopes there will be a recovery eventually. Even after the Great Depression of the 1930s, the economy recovered eventually. Is that the best Conservatives have to offer?

• (1435)

Mr. Ted Menzies (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, talking about offering, as I said, we still have not had any offering of anything constructive. That hon. member and his colleagues continue to stand in this House and decry the fact that there has not been a dollar of new spending out this year. It just started yesterday. This is only April 2. We are moving the money out.

The hon. transport minister assures us that this money is going out as fast as he can get it out. That is to stimulate the economy. That is to get people working again.

* * *

[*Translation*]

FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it appears that AbitibiBowater will not be able to reach a restructuring agreement. It also appears that this global forestry giant is headed for bankruptcy.

Will the Conservatives admit that the forestry industry is in crisis and that a clear strategy to support AbitibiBowater and the entire forestry industry is urgently needed?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government is very aware of what is happening to AbitibiBowater and all the companies in Canada's forestry industry. We are monitoring the situation closely. Naturally, we are concerned about the fate of AbitibiBowater's 7,500 employees in Quebec and the single-industry communities where these companies are located.

However, AbitibiBowater is continuing to operate. These are business decisions, and we are monitoring what is happening to this company very closely. Of course, we hope that it can continue working in this wonderful industry.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the initiatives the government is talking about do not benefit the forestry industry. Witnesses heard today by an industry subcommittee told us that they had no access to credit, research and development assistance or other federal programs. Plants continue to close, communities continue to be hard hit and families are losing their livelihood.

[*English*]

Why have the Conservatives not tabled and implemented a clear forestry strategy?

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have put a number of measures in place. Like my colleagues here in this House, you are well aware that the problems facing the forestry industry have to do with the market, no matter what anyone says. Members may want to use the men and women who work in the forestry industry to score political points, but unfortunately, companies are selling fewer products than before, at lower prices than before, and they are losing money.

Those are the facts. Members may want to score political points using the regions when they never go there. As for me, I go back home every weekend. We will continue to support these industries and these companies in the forestry sector.

* * *

GOODS AND SERVICES TAX

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as *La Presse's* editorial writer, André Pratte, correctly pointed out, "The Minister of Finance...should reread the budget he tabled last year. That budget invited provinces that had not yet harmonized their sales taxes to go ahead and do it. The budget named the errant provinces and, surprise, surprise—Quebec was not one of them".

Will the government acknowledge that Quebec's sales tax is harmonized with the GST and that Quebec should therefore be compensated?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we listened to what the finance minister, Ms. Jérôme-Forget, said. We are keeping a close eye on the situation. As I said, we will begin good-faith negotiations if Ms. Jérôme-Forget follows up on what she said.

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would strongly suggest that the Minister of Finance and all of the members opposite reread what the Minister of Finance said two years ago.

Yesterday, Quebec's finance minister wrote to her federal counterpart to say that Quebec agrees to changing the details that the Conservatives say prevent them from compensating Quebec. Quebec is ready to negotiate, but it takes two to tango.

Will the government commit to negotiating compensation for Quebec similar to that for Ontario in good faith?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the answer has not changed. We repeated it over and over yesterday. Ms. Jérôme-Forget said that changes would have to be made to make Quebec's situation more like Ontario's. We are keeping a close eye on things, and we will engage in good-faith negotiations if things go that way.

* * *

● (1440)

AFGHANISTAN

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Karzai government has passed a retrograde piece of legislation that oppresses 50% of the population, specifically, women. Although

this bill directly attacks only Shiite women, as we all know, in a country that accuses rape victims of adultery, the rights of all Afghan women are in peril. The Minister of International Trade has said that passing this law will have serious repercussions.

Can he tell us what those repercussions will be?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are very concerned about this situation and about laws in Afghanistan. It is very worrisome. The government of Afghanistan must fulfill its international obligations and protect human rights, especially women's rights, and we are calling on it to do so. We will insist that it do so.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, expressing one's serious concerns is not enough. Other steps could be taken. First, the government must firmly and clearly denounce this Afghan law at the NATO meeting. In addition, the government simply has to take the millions of dollars that Canada would have spent on future plans with the Karzai government to support the Afghan people, and transfer that money to NGOs that could help people directly.

Does the minister not believe that non-governmental organizations are in a much better position to help women than a government that allows them to be oppressed?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all, it is important to point out that the NATO meeting has not yet begun. However, every chance we get, with our foreign affairs ministers and our prime ministers, we are very clear. We insist that the government of Afghanistan protect human rights, and protect and support women's rights. We will continue to insist.

* * *

[English]

INDUSTRY

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about the jobs of tomorrow.

Venture capital is critical in financing private sector research and in Canada it is drying up. The Business Development Bank of Canada warns that we could lose hundreds of innovative small companies in their infancy. To quote a senior VP: "It breaks my heart because if we let go of these technology companies, once this recession is over you will have lost all this [new] technology, you will have lost a decade".

What are the Conservatives doing about this? Do they know that they are saying no to the jobs of tomorrow?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, quite the opposite. In fact, in our economic action plan, we included a \$3 billion increase to the capital of the BDC. Venture capital funding is and will be part of that funding.

I can assure the hon. member and members of this House that we believe in venture capital. We believe it is important for our marketplace to have a space for venture capital and we will be supportive of the BDC in this regard.

Oral Questions

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a result of the economic crisis, we all know that venture capital is drying up and many small Canadian companies that are producing cutting edge technology are in danger of dying. Ballard Power Systems is a British Columbia company. It is a world leader in fuel cell technology. It is shedding 39 jobs; 8% of its work force.

I have a question for the minister. Would the government assist this and other companies in this great country to actually continue to create and protect the jobs of tomorrow?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have some great Canadian companies doing some great work in many different sectors, including new fuel technology, and we want to support that. That is what the ecoEnergy retrofit is all about. That includes our green plans that my colleague, the Minister of Environment, is pursuing as well.

Certainly, if Ballard wishes to speak to me, and I had a very good discussion with them a couple of months ago, if Ballard has have some projects that the Government of Canada can be helpful with, then we are all ears.

* * *

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the North American auto industry is one of the most integrated in the world with over \$150 billion in cross-border trade annually. Logically then, the Conservatives should be working with the Americans on an integrated solution. Yet, the Minister of Industry was completely caught off guard when President Obama announced numerous initiatives to shore up consumer confidence.

With so many jobs on the line, why is government out of the loop?

● (1445)

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in fact, it is quite the opposite. As President Obama said himself to the people of the United States of America in his live televised address on Monday, he is working with Canadians. He saluted Canadians. That means the Canadian government. It is because we have a consistent cogent position on the auto sector. It does not mean the Liberals, who say one thing at one end of the country and another thing at the other end of the country.

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, many of my constituents in Mississauga—Brampton South work in the auto sector. Constituents like Gerry Mifsud of Berger Precision Ltd. need the government to fight for their interests. The Americans understand this and they have implemented bankruptcy protection, guarantees for car warranties, and incentives for the purchase of new vehicles.

Why has the minister done nothing? Why has he abandoned the auto sector? Why has he abandoned Gerry?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I hope the hon. member has told Gerry about all the wonderful things we have done in conjunction with Premier Dalton McGuinty to secure the 20% production capacity here in Canada. We are on the file and have been on the file, quite frankly, since we were re-elected in October.

On this side of the House there has not been a peep, except for those who say in British Columbia that they do not support the auto sector and then in the House crow about how they want to be supportive of the auto sector. That is not leadership.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Liberals voted for the NDP's Bill C-311 tiddlywink bill. It is a bill the Liberal member from Ottawa South suggests has targets that are fiscally irresponsible because there is no accompanying plan to accomplish them causing him to say, and I quote, "We might as well be sitting at a table with Monopoly money and Tidley Winks".

Could the Minister of the Environment please explain to the House the right way forward on climate change?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the coalition is obviously alive and well. Everyone in Canada, except for the opposition, knows that a responsible climate change plan turns upon our economic realities. That is why we are working together on the clean energy dialogue with the U.S. administration. That is why we took leadership with harmonized tailpipe emission standards yesterday.

Meanwhile, every single member of the Liberal Party stood yesterday and voted in favour of a bill that their own critic calls the tiddlywink bill. Shame.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in 2008 Dr. O'Connor revealed high rates of cancers in Fort Chipewyan First Nations. Health Canada responded by filing complaints against the doctor with the Alberta College of Physicians, alleging he had caused undue alarm. Alberta Health Services has verified that the rates of three types of cancers are higher than expected and has recommended action be taken. The community has asked Health Canada to withdraw this complaint against its doctor.

Will the Minister fo Health end this unfounded witch hunt and will she exercise her legal duty to examine the role that toxins in the Athabasca River play in higher cancer rates?

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have put more money into aboriginal health care in this country and the Minister of Health will be taking action as she sees fit.

Oral Questions

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the health care problems are not just in northern Alberta. Last week, twin babies from the remote Garden Hill First Nation in Manitoba were medevaced to Winnipeg to undergo emergency treatment for meningitis which went undetected at their local nursing station, said to be of World War II vintage. Sadly, one of the babies died. This is not an isolated incident. A recent Health Canada report found that aboriginal children are dying at a rate four times higher than that of non-native kids. That is just unacceptable.

What steps will be taken to ensure more first nations children will not needlessly die on the government's watch?

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for asking a question on this issue. I would like to express my sincere sympathies to the families following the illness of their children and the tragic loss of their son.

Our government is committed to providing quality health care to the Garden Hill First Nation. The community is supported by a recently built nursing station which provides services 24/7. Health Canada is in the process of reviewing the facts of these cases.

* * *

• (1450)

[Translation]

GUN REGISTRY

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, everyone in Quebec agrees that the gun registry is vital to the integrated and effective fight against crime. The Prime Minister's new light version is no better than his member's bill. The goal is the same: to abolish the current gun registry. The Prime Minister has even asked Canada's hunters to push for abolition of the registry.

Why does the Prime Minister refuse to listen to the survivors of the Dawson College shooting, such as Mr. Kadhim, who wrote a letter asking him to maintain the gun registry?

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government, of course, is very concerned with the battle against crime and against gun crime. That is why we have been carrying out a very ambitious legislative agenda on those matters, which included mandatory prison sentences for gun crimes, which we had some challenges getting adopted by the House, I might remind everyone. We also have been working on legislation that the justice minister has introduced to combat organized crime and drug crimes. Those are the kinds of things that are going to focus on criminals.

As for the long gun registry, that is a matter of targeting farmers, law-abiding hunters. That is not where the problem is. The problem is fighting crime.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I do not see why mandatory minimums would have better results than the 7-year minimum prison terms for importing marijuana 20 years ago.

The Conservatives want to abolish the gun registry and the Liberals and the NDP dither because they have no party line on the matter. In fact, the Liberals and the NDP are giving in to the Conservatives' blackmail.

Will the government end its obsession with abolishing the registry or will it give Quebec the authority to manage the gun registry for itself? That is what the Government of Quebec and all stakeholders are asking for.

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as everyone knows, the long gun registry was enacted pursuant to the criminal law powers the federal government possesses under the Constitution. As a result, those could not be transferred. The province, of course, does have its own ability to act under its powers regarding property rights. If it wishes to do that, it can of course do that and we could have nothing to say about it.

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EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a recently laid-off auto worker in my riding is not eligible for EI because in Toronto the government requires 700 qualifying hours. Because this individual only had 699 hours, he was denied EI.

Would the minister explain why an unemployed worker with the exact same number of hours living in one of 26 other regions qualifies for EI, while my constituent does not? How can she justify this discrimination?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the EI program automatically adjusts itself to the unemployment rate. As it goes higher, the amount of time required goes lower and the benefits increase. It is a program that was implemented by the former Liberal government when the unemployment rate was higher than it is today. However, we have done expansions to the program and we have included things to help people from being laid off. For example, the work sharing program allows people not to be laid off and continue working during these tough economic times.

Oral Questions

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): What is sad, Mr. Speaker, is the Conservatives continue to refer to the extension of the benefits for five weeks. That was a Liberal program that was established in 28 ridings. Those guys took it nationally and we support that, but that is not the question here. It is not about the last five weeks. It is about the first five days and the tens of thousands of Canadians who cannot get benefits. We need minimal national qualifying hours.

When will the government do something about the people who are hurting in this country?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure how much plainer we can make it. Five weeks is more than two weeks, and those who are unemployed for a longer period of time need those benefits most at the end of their search for employment.

David Dodge, the former governor of the Bank of Canada, said that the first two weeks are there for a very good reason. Many of the people who are being laid off get some sort of bridge payment through that period. That is not where the real issue is. The real issue is that some people will be laid off work for a long period of time. That is when the benefit is required and that is why we have extended it by five weeks.

* * *

• (1455)

[Translation]

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, by reducing the quotas allocated to the fishers of New Brunswick and Quebec in favour of certain organizations in her province, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans is putting the shrimp fishing industry at peril. She is giving special treatment to Prince Edward Island where there are neither shrimp boats nor shrimp processing plants.

The job of the government is to represent the interests of all Canadians, not just those in a minister's province.

Why does the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans want to punish the shrimp fishing industry of New Brunswick and Quebec? Because they did not vote Conservative?

[English]

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. member that provinces with the lion's share of gulf shrimp, which are Quebec, New Brunswick and Newfoundland and Labrador, will not see any decrease to their normal allocation. As a matter of fact, they will see a slight increase to their allocation.

Any future quota increases will be allocated with a slight upward adjustment of less than 1% for Nova Scotia and P.E.I. To put this in perspective, Quebec has almost 60% of the quota and P.E.I. has 1.1%.

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, according to a report by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, inward inspection of grain ensures that Canadian grain is free from harmful contaminants or other safety hazards.

In 2008, ergot, a dangerous fungal disease, was prevalent along the Manitoba-Saskatchewan border. Canada's grain inspection system was able to ensure that dangerous levels of ergot were kept out of the food supply.

Bill C-13 proposes to eliminate inward inspection by the Canadian Grain Commission. Does the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food agree that this would create a serious gap in the Canadian food safety system?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite has it totally wrong. It is not pronounced "ergo"; it is pronounced "ergot".

Having said that, inward grading is still available. Inward inspection is still available. It has nothing to do with food safety. It is a blending of product as it moves between inland terminals and export position. The grain is still checked as it goes into the elevator pit. It is still checked as it is exported out of this country. Food safety is retained.

By getting rid of Bill C-13 today, the opposition parties have hamstrung producers again. It is an antiquated act. It is darned near as old as the NDP.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Ed Holder (London West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, London, Ontario is a long way from Canada's Arctic, but that does not mean we are not concerned about the issues of the north. In fact, the opposite is true.

The Conservative government's attention and focus on the Arctic is unprecedented. The Minister of National Defence has rightly praised our air force and Norad in protecting North American air space. Canada's Arctic, our true north strong and free, is vast.

Would the Minister of National Defence advise the House, what are the things Canada is doing to protect our Arctic sovereignty?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Forces, including the air force, are preparing to exercise Canadian sovereignty in northern Operation Nunavut.

The operation will highlight the unique capabilities of the Canadian Rangers, their ability to respond in the most remote areas of the north. The Rangers are an integral part of our Arctic policy, where we are increasing their numbers to a total of 5,000.

Our government has just announced the construction of two new satellite ground stations to enhance our surveillance and security there.

Oral Questions

Through investments under the Canada first defence strategy, we will acquire ships, a training centre in Resolute Bay, and a new deepwater facility in Nanisivik.

Our government is leading and addressing the challenges and opportunities.

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CONTRABAND TOBACCO PRODUCTS

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, criminal gangs are raking in huge profits in the illegal trade of tobacco products which flow freely across the Canada-U.S. border. This is costing the treasury \$2.8 billion, but it also costs the minister's own province of Quebec \$300 million. While the RCMP is trying to stop this criminal activity, the CRA is giving licences to operators linked to organized crime.

Will the Minister of Public Safety talk to the Minister of National Revenue and stop this farce?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of National Revenue and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, when someone applies for a tobacco producer's licence, a very stringent process is initiated. First we check with the RCMP for any criminal record. If they have one, it is certain that no licence will be issued. A licence is issued after the process is finished and the person has been found to be on the up and up. But if that person's status changes along the way and some criminal aspect comes into it, the licence will be revoked. Each time a licence is issued, we ask the RCMP to do a check.

* * *

• (1500)

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Ariel Arenas, a former Mexican police officer, believes his life is in danger because he knows too much about drug traffickers, but his refugee claim has been refused. Mr. Arenas is in a dilemma at the present time. He is the object of an expulsion order from the border services, yet at the same time he has been ordered to appear before the IRB at his wife's hearing.

After question period, could the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism take the 20 steps necessary to bring him over to his colleague, the Minister of Public Safety, in order to explain to him that if Mr. Arenas wishes to comply with the subpoena, he would need to still be in Canada?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I cannot comment on specific cases, as that would be contrary to the Privacy Act.

I will be pleased to discuss this case with the hon. member if he has received a letter of permission from the citizen in question.

[*English*]

FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, each day in the forestry industry, we learn of new layoffs, extended shutdowns and companies that cannot secure credit to maintain operations. Rodney and Carrol Whalley own and operate Whalley Logging Limited in Atikokan. They have seven employees. Whalley Logging does not want a handout. It needs a loan guarantee.

Will the government provide forestry companies like Whalley Logging with the loan guarantees they need to keep operating and keep hard-working Canadians employed?

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the member were here a couple of weeks ago and heard the debate on the forestry issues, he would know that we have an integrated approach to this situation. In the long term we have set in place a number of issues, including access to credit, which he is talking about today. We also have the \$1 billion community adjustment fund in place. We are trying to develop markets and new technology for folks.

There is an integrated approach to dealing with the pressures on the forestry industry. This government is getting the job done for the forestry community.

* * *

AUTISM

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, autism is an important issue that presents challenges for many Canadian families. This Conservative government has done more for this issue than any other federal government has by funding a chair of autism research at Simon Fraser University and funding autism research through the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.

Will the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health please tell the House what other measures our government is taking to address this important issue?

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for her question and I would like to thank the member for Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont for his hard work and commitment to autism advocacy.

Our government recognizes that autism is an important health and social issue that presents challenges for many Canadian families. I am pleased to inform the House that our government has declared April 2 as Autism Awareness Day in Canada. Better knowledge about autism is essential to family service providers and policy makers. I can assure the House that our government is showing leadership by focusing our attention on building the autism evidence base so that future action by our partners will be well informed.

I strongly believe that through our contributions and by working with our partners, we can enhance Canada's capacity—

The Speaker: Order, please. It being Thursday, I believe the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine has a question.

*Routine Proceedings***BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the government House leader would reiterate his plans for the business for the rest of today and for tomorrow.

At the same time, given that the next two weeks are a scheduled parliamentary break, I wonder if the government House leader could also specifically tell us what House business he and his government are planning for the full week of April 20 when we come back.

Hon. Jay Hill (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today, Bill S-3, the energy efficiency bill, was read a second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Natural Resources.

Just before question period, we were debating Bill C-13, the Canada Grain Act, but it appears the coalition of the Liberals, the NDP and the Bloc has been revived and it is supporting a motion that, if adopted, will defeat that bill. It is proposing to kill the bill before it even gets to committee. It is unfortunate that the coalition's first act is to abdicate its role as legislators by denying close scrutiny and study of a bill at a committee.

After my statement, the government will be calling Bill C-5, Indian oil and gas, followed by Bill C-18, the bill respecting RCMP pensions, which is at second reading.

Tomorrow, we will continue with the business that I just laid out for the remainder of today.

When the House returns on April 20, after two weeks of constituency work, we will continue with any unfinished business from this week, with the addition of Bill C-25, the truth in sentencing bill, Bill C-24, the Canada-Peru free trade agreement, Bill C-11, human pathogens and toxins and Bill C-6, consumer products safety. We can see we have a lot of work to do yet. All of these bills are at second reading, with the exception of Bill C-11, which will be at report stage.

During the first week the House returns from the constituency weeks, we expect that Bill C-3, the Arctic waters bill will be reported back from committee. We also anticipate that the Senate will send a message respecting Bill S-2, the customs act. If and when that happens, I will be adding those two bills to the list of business for that week.

Thursday, April 23, shall be an allotted day.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1505)

[English]

RESIGNATION OF MEMBER

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this might be my last opportunity to stand and speak as a member of Parliament since the House will adjourn tomorrow. I want to announce that I will be resigning my seat on April 13.

You and I were first elected, Mr. Speaker, in the 1988 election, although I must say I am rather envious of your win-loss record. I have had a couple of losses along the way and you have maintained your seat since 1988.

It has been an enormous pleasure and honour to serve the people of New Westminster, Burnaby, Coquitlam and Port Moody.

When I was first elected, Ed Broadbent was the leader of my party, and he remains a very close friend and confidante.

I was a member when my party elected the first woman to lead a national party in our country and was and still am so proud to have served with Audrey McLaughlin. She is a woman of tremendous courage and determination. She has also continued to provide me with encouragement and support over the years.

I have been very honoured to be part of an NDP caucus, led by the member for Toronto—Danforth. His boundless energy, ability to think outside the box and to take the road less travelled has been an inspiration not only to me but also many Canadians.

I am proud of my record. I introduced a private member's bill, which was adopted by the House, to declare December 6 a National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women.

I was part of a committee that I suggested do a groundbreaking study on all of the issues around breast cancer, which led to real changes in the treatment of women with that disease and their families.

I brought forward a private member's bill on anti-stalking legislation, which the government of the day passed into law. That is now part of the Criminal Code of Canada.

I have a couple of other private members' bills on the books right now on body armour and non-returnable warrants. I invite the government side to take them over and present them as its own legislation.

Hon. James Moore: Ask for unanimous consent.

Ms. Dawn Black: I may ask for unanimous consent.

The highlight for me of the 39th Parliament was an opportunity to travel to Afghanistan with the defence committee to meet with the men and women who were serving in the Canadian Forces there. I was very impressed by their determination, skill, high level of training and their commitment to Canada and the job they were being asked to do.

The defence committee wrote a report on the war in Afghanistan. I, it will not be a surprise to most members, presented a dissenting opinion on that report. I believe that dissenting report is as valid today as it was two years ago when I wrote it.

I mention these achievements because too often Canadians think there is no effective role for an opposition member of Parliament. Some think members in opposition cannot achieve anything. It is very important for Canadians to know that all of us in this place can and do achieve real results for ordinary Canadians.

Routine Proceedings

Canadians only see question period reflected in the news cycle, so they can be forgiven for thinking that Parliament is a nasty kind of sandlot filled with testosterone-driven egos. The truth is that all of us on both sides of the House have more in common than what divides us. We disagree on some fundamental policy issues, and that is an important part of our democratic system.

I hold my values as a social democrat very strongly, just as others in this place hold different views. I only wish that we could debate these differences with a bit more civility.

I urge all my colleagues to tone down the insults and abuse. What has been hurled back and forth across the floor has often lacked wit and wisdom. This place has become less civil over the past few years and I believe that this is evident in the increasing cynicism all of us hear from voters when we go door to door. It is, ultimately, dangerous for our democratic system.

• (1510)

There is one other issue I must draw attention to, and that is the glacial rate of progress toward gender equality in this place. The first woman MP, Agnes Macphail, was elected in 1921. This was a breakthrough for my grandmother's generation, my mother was not even born then.

Now in 2009, women represent just over 22% of the House of Commons. We have hovered around 20% for the last 15 years. At this rate of progress, and I have used the most up-to-date scientific calculations to determine this, it will take until December 4, 2100 to reach parity. That is darn near 100 years from now, and it is simply not good enough.

I urge all political parties in the House to get with it and nominate more women. After all, we are more than 50% of the population of our country. It is well past time. Our Parliament must more accurately reflect the Canadian population in every way.

I want to conclude with a few words of thanks. I am trying not to get emotional. I want to thank the Clerk, Audrey O'Brien, for all the assistance she has given me. It is a huge privilege for me to serve in a Parliament with the first woman to ever hold this prestigious and very important position.

I want to thank my staff in the constituency office, and all members know about this, because they are the front line people. They are the ones who face the sometimes angry constituents, the people who have issues around some of the government policies. They work so hard and I want thank them for all the work they have done for me over the years.

I want to thank to my staff on Parliament Hill, without whom I know I would not have been nearly as successful as I have been over the last few years.

I also want to thank some of the support people on the Hill: the drivers, the food services people, the postal workers, the messengers, the clerks, the interpreters, the security guards and the pages. All of these wonderful people make it possible for all of us to do our jobs. I know I could not have been nearly as effective without their help.

I want to thank my husband, Peter, who has sometimes taken abuse because of the road I have travelled and my choice to run for

political office. I know at one point, while canvassing for me on the doorstep, one angry man said to him "What kind of man are you? How do you allow your wife to do such a thing?" I know that has been tough, and it has been hard to have me away. I appreciate his support all these years.

I want to thank my sons, Matthew, David and Stuart, their terrific partners and my seven very brilliant grandchildren.

There are some things I will not miss. I will not miss the weekly flights from B.C. I will not miss the jet lag. However, there is much I will miss here. I will miss my colleagues on both sides of the House. I will miss the work, especially at committee where great things are sometimes accomplished.

I wish all of my hon. colleagues in this place great wisdom and great compassion as they face the crisis that is affecting Canadians today. Finally, I want to thank the voters of New Westminster—Coquitlam for putting their faith and confidence in me.

• (1515)

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while the very popular member is receiving congratulations on an incredible political career as she is saying goodbye, I just want to add our best wishes to her on behalf of the Prime Minister, on behalf of the government and on behalf of a fellow tri-city resident who has taken many flights with my hon. colleague across this country over many years.

I am very pleased to have the opportunity to say farewell to a friend, farewell in the political sense of the House. She is leaving this place but she is not leaving public service. She is seeking the nomination in an election in a provincial campaign which will be decided on May 12 of this year in British Columbia.

Politics and public service has always been a part of the member's life. As a matter of fact, she worked for a number of years for Pauline Jewett who was a former well-respected and well-regarded NDP member of Parliament in this place and served four terms, three of them from British Columbia. The member served in her office, serving constituents in her own way, which we all know that our staff does in a multitude of ways that only help to serve our civil society. When Pauline Jewett decided not to seek re-election, a door opened and the member stepped into it and stepped through it.

The member was elected into the House in the campaign of 1988. She made some substantive contributions, not the least of which is the one for which she is most noted and which she mentioned in her speech. After the tragic murder of 14 women on December 6, 1989, the member passed a private member's bill to recognize nationally the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women. This year marks the 20th anniversary of that horrible tragic moment. It is a remarkable tribute that 20 years later this will not just be recognized as a local tragedy but as something the entire country needs to recognize as we all move forward to try to build a better society. That is, in part, because of the work of the member for New Westminster—Coquitlam.

Routine Proceedings

It is often very easy for these tragedies to come and go and for us to say how awful they were, but to elevate and define the greater problem, to point a light on it and to force debate and discussion is a very helpful thing. It is a remarkable tribute to a remarkable woman who has served the House in many ways with distinction.

I have looked at the list and I have looked at the dates that she was in the House and I saw that she has had the opportunity to debate Prime Minister Joe Clark as minister, Prime Minister John Turner as opposition leader, Prime Minister Mulroney, Prime Minister Chrétien, Prime Minister Paul Martin, our current Prime Minister and, of course, to serve with Ed Broadbent, Audrey McLaughlin and Alexa McDonough in this place. A lot of Canadian history has come across this floor that she has been a witness to and in fact has been a part of in very important and very helpful ways.

When she discussed and mentioned in her talk about the importance of civility in the House, I can say that those were not empty words. I know from personal experience. About a year ago, I had a situation in the House and that member was one of the first people to call me and to recognize that what happened was wrong.

We have neighbouring ridings and in an election campaign a few years ago, when it was particularly nasty and personal but unnecessarily so, she went out of her way to call the opposing NDP candidate and tell the candidate to cool it. She walks her talk when it comes to civility in Canadian politics and not just in the House but elsewhere.

I looked on the Library of Parliament website and it says that the member has served for 2,965 days. I suspect she has felt every one of those days. With those long flights to and from Vancouver, I know it is not easy spending 10-plus hours every week in a tube, in an airplane and suffering through the food, the waits and all that sort of stuff, but we all do it because we believe in service and we believe in greater values.

When she was engaged in these debates, she would say that good strong debates in politics were a part of politics and that it was the best of politics when people had firm disagreements and disagree in thoughtful ways. She has given more than she has gotten. She has won more than she has lost.

What is the federal NDP caucus' loss may well be the provincial NDP caucus' gain.

To Peter, to Stuart, Matthew and David, and to Christopher, Ian, Meagan, Lauren, Kate, Maggie and Rebecca, "your bride, your mother, your grandma is coming home and she has earned it".

Congratulations!

• (1520)

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I feel extremely honoured and privileged to have the opportunity to say a few words about the member for New Westminster—Coquitlam who is a good friend. I have known her for many decades and I had the opportunity and honour to work with her when I was the Premier of British Columbia.

She is a great member of Parliament, a great British Columbian and a great Canadian. We have talked many times during those

flights back home and, at other times, we talked about our grandchildren.

I want to tell her, Peter and everyone else in her family that they will have her back. She will have at least 12 hours on her hands, which she used to spend on flights, to spend with her grandchildren. I have three grandchildren but she has many more. I do not know whether I will ever catch up.

I want to tell the member that it has been an absolute delight to know her as a human being and as a friend. In a sense, she has been a friend and a guide because she was here before I was here. She has lived her principles. She has shown the breadth and depth of her commitment with the issues that she has tackled and with the vigour and determination with which she has tackled those issues.

I know she probably thinks it will be bit of a relief to go back to British Columbia but in British Columbia politics is known as a blood sport. I do not know how much more or less civil it will be but politics in British Columbia is as exciting as ever. I know that when she goes back to British Columbia she will make a great contribution to my province and her province and will continue to make a great contribution to this country.

I thank the member for serving us in Canada and in British Columbia.

• (1525)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to add my voice to those of my colleagues in thanking the hon. member for New Westminster—Coquitlam for her services to the House.

I have been sitting for eight years now on the Standing Committee on National Defence, and my colleague has always impressed me with her bearing and the way she presents her arguments. She is a highly intelligent woman with her own particular way of presenting the issues, but she is also a woman with a big heart and great humanity, something that is extremely important in the work we do.

This is a woman who brings all the data together and gives it a human dimension, which is indeed a character trait of many women. This is why it is important for the political world to open up to the idea of more and more women coming in to change politics, no matter the parliament in question.

So I want to say to my colleague on the Standing Committee on National Defence that we have greatly appreciated her presence. Furthermore, politically speaking, the Bloc Québécois and I were often on the same side of the fence as she, and were often looking across at the same people on the other side of the fence. But she was always very civilized about it, with the emphasis on dialogue.

Mention must also be made of the charisma of this woman. Although one must be careful when provoking her, because under her sweetness and charisma there lurks a veritable lioness. She is capable of baring her claws and biting. I have seen her do it. Fortunately I have not been a victim, but I have seen her do it. She is perfectly capable of defending herself, and whatever parliament she works in, I am sure she will make a great member.

Routine Proceedings

I would like to add something which I think will please her. I believe that her family, which is in attendance here, was a major factor in her decision to go back home. This too must be respected. Often members will say that they have had a very active life in politics, but have only one regret, that of not being there enough for their family. I want to thank this family for having loaned us a woman of such calibre. This must have been a great sacrifice, for they were deprived of her presence for many years.

This return to the bosom of her family is important, and I think it must be emphasized. Politicians often need the support of their family. When we are a long way away, we find it difficult because our family is not close by. Of course we then turn to friends, but that is not the same as turning to one's own family.

Therefore I want to thank her husband, her children and her grandchildren for allowing us to discover this great lady of politics.

The Bloc Québécois wishes this hon. member good luck with her career. We are eager to go and meet with her in her new parliament in British Columbia.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of our entire caucus and our former leaders Ed Broadbent, Audrey McLaughlin and Alexa McDonough, I offer our thanks for her extraordinary work and service to our country. Dawn Black is a courageous woman and a woman of integrity, who has worked unflinchingly for her constituents of New Westminster—Coquitlam. Our thanks are heartfelt.

I also very much appreciated the fact that the members remained in the House while we thanked my colleague. This shows the respect that all MPs have for the efforts of this extraordinary member.

[*English*]

I can say that the member of Parliament, as a member of a caucus, is an extraordinary contributor. I think all of us in this chamber have participated in caucus meetings and, from the way in which the member conducts herself here, I think members can imagine that in a caucus meeting she is a very important influence for us all. She has a sense of humour, which she utilizes strategically. However, I must say that there are very few others in the caucus who command the kind of respect that the member commands when she speaks to us about important issues.

I do not mind saying that when I asked the member if she would take on the challenge of being our spokesperson on issues of defence, she was a bit surprised. However, none of her colleagues were surprised at the recommendation, because when a country is involved in war those discussions are so important. I want to underline something that the member spoke about in her speech just a few minutes ago because she underlines it all the time with us. She says that as we discuss the issues of war and what we have asked our brave soldiers to do and all of those who work in our military, we must always remember that they are courageous, that they are our children, that they are young people in our country who are trying to make a difference and that they are motivated by the very best of what it is to be a Canadian and, therefore, no matter what debates might happen about what we ask those in the military to do, we must always stand firm in the recognition, as we do on all sides of this House, of that service. I believe that, perhaps in part, it is because she has family members who serve on the front lines and I know

how proud she is of the service of her sons, for example, who she speaks about quite often.

● (1530)

I can only imagine what a challenge it was, because of the emotions of the time, when the École Polytechnique massacre took place. The member worked with her colleagues in the House at that terrible time to ask what we could do to make a difference for the future, how we could take on the challenge of violence against women that the terrible attack represented. The lasting contribution that will probably stand out for so many years was her initiative that secured the support of the entire House, which is hard to do, for the declaration of a day of remembrance and action on December 6 of each and every year.

In recognition of the work of this wonderful member of Parliament, I think we could rededicate ourselves to that issue and try to infuse into that day even more meaning. There is no question that the issue of violence against women continues to be a very serious problem, not just here in Canada but around the world.

I should say that the member, while she was out of politics, stayed involved internationally through the Socialist International, which brings together countries from all around the world and political parties from those countries, including many governments, to take action on major issues. She focused on the issues affecting women through her work there.

I believe the emphasis she has placed here today and has continued to place on the important role of women in politics and the need to have more women in the House of Commons and at all levels of government is so important. I want to thank her for reminding us of that today. She has given us a challenge, because we do seem to be stuck at about 20% in the House of Commons. I think we should all work towards the day when we have full representation for women in the House of Commons, and that would be 50% plus one.

She has also participated in so many things. She is a member of the Greater Van Gogos. I am not sure that everybody knew that. The Gogos are the Canadian grandmothers who came together with the grandmothers of Africa who are now raising their grandchildren because their daughters have passed away due to the AIDS crisis in Africa. I know the Stephen Lewis Foundation played a considerable role in acting as a catalyst there. The work of these grandmothers is quite extraordinary. I know that is a cause that our member will no doubt be continuing on with.

Because so many wonderful words have been said here today, I simply want to close with a reference to the family and staff. The staff have worked very hard. The member has had an extraordinary team working with her. Of course, her family's support has always been there and been so solid. I can say that she is very proud of her family and we are as well.

On behalf of New Democrats across the country, we want to wish the member of Parliament for New Westminster—Coquitlam well in her next venture. We do hope that she will be successful in it. We do hope that we will be working with her in a new capacity. We will miss her here, but her contributions are by no means reaching a conclusion. In some ways, they are just beginning.

Points of Order

●(1535)

The Speaker: I pass on best wishes to the hon. member for New Westminster—Coquitlam also.

I believe another point of order is arising here. The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

BILL C-304—SECURE, ADEQUATE, ACCESSIBLE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING ACT

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order with respect to Bill C-304, An Act to ensure secure, adequate, accessible and affordable housing for Canadians, brought forward by the member for Vancouver East.

Without commenting on the merits of Bill C-304, I submit that this bill would create new spending and therefore must be accompanied by a royal recommendation.

Bill C-304 would require the minister responsible for the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation to consult with provinces, municipalities and aboriginal communities to establish a national housing strategy.

Subclause 3(1) of Bill C-304 provides that the minister responsible for the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation shall, following consultations with provincial ministers and representatives of municipalities and aboriginal communities:

establish a national housing strategy designed to ensure that the cost of housing in Canada does not compromise an individual's ability to meet other basic needs, including food, clothing and access to education.

Subclause 3(2) states:

The national housing strategy shall provide financial assistance, including financing and credit without discrimination, for those who are otherwise unable to afford rental housing.

I submit that subclause 3(2), relating to providing financing and credit without discrimination, can only be accomplished by making changes to the parameters governing provision by the Government of Canada of a guarantee to mortgage loan insurers operating in Canada.

Providing homeowner mortgage loan insurance to individuals who were previously unable to obtain financing because of their financial circumstances would require changes to the mortgage loan insurance parameters, which would change the guarantee that the government provides to private mortgage loan insurers in Canada as well as to the conditions and criteria used by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation to determine eligibility for mortgage insurance.

Therefore, the effect of the national housing strategy would be to broaden the eligibility of homeowner mortgage loan insurance, which would increase government liabilities by covering individuals who would otherwise not have been eligible for such loans.

In a decision on changes to the parameters for a program, on April 23, 1990, the Speaker ruled in the case of Bill C-69, the Expenditures Restraint Act, that:

...there are instances where the objects, purposes, conditions and qualifications may be affected in such a manner as to involve financial implications. For instance, if a program is extended to cover an additional period of time or if the parameters of a program are broadened to cover more applicants, then a royal recommendation is necessary.

In a decision on increasing government liabilities, on June 12, 1973, the Speaker ruled in the case of Bill S-5, An Act to amend the Farm Improvement Loans Act, that:

It may be said that the proposal in Bill S-5 does not in itself propose a direct expenditure. It does, however, propose substantial additional liabilities on public monies.

The responsibility for housing is shared between federal, provincial and municipal governments. Bill C-304 appears to rely on the constitutional spending power to implement an expanded federal role in housing in the form of a new federal housing strategy.

Subclause 3(2) of Bill C-304 makes clear that a key element of this new national housing strategy would be to increase federal spending on housing.

Therefore, I humbly submit that the bill should be accompanied by a royal recommendation.

●(1540)

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am the member who is putting forward Bill C-304, which will receive its first hour of debate today. I have listened very carefully to the comments from the member across the way who is rising and suggesting that this bill will require a royal recommendation.

I first introduced this bill a number of years ago, and I have reintroduced it in this Parliament. I have to say that it was written very carefully. The purpose of the bill was designed in such a way that it is focusing on the development of the need for a strategy and a plan. I would submit that there is a difference, a very key difference, and a balance between a bill that speaks to the need to have the development of a strategy and plan and a bill that actually clearly delineates that money shall be spent.

The focus of this bill is to say that the federal government should be collaborating with the provinces, the territories, first nations, and municipalities to develop a housing strategy for Canadians. What flows from that plan would be the subject of another debate, should this pass, and I hope it will pass because I think it is something that is urgently needed in this country. It may well be at that time, in terms of when a plan is developed, that we will be in a debate such as the member has raised today.

The focus and the key element of this bill is for the federal government to work with its partners to develop a plan and a strategy. It does not speak to the implementation or the development of funds or the expenditure of funds, it focuses on the need to develop a plan in partnership with other key stakeholders across the country.

Government Orders

I feel that is a very important difference. As submissions are received, Mr. Speaker, I hope you will consider that and recognize that developing a plan is something that I as a member, and other members, should be able to call on the government to do. It is within the government's mandate to do that, to work with other partners. What flows from that would be the subject of a further discussion, a further debate, and these issues may arise, but they do not arise at this particular time for the purposes of Bill C-304.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I am rising to respond to my hon. colleague's response to my point of order.

I appreciate the fact that the member has drafted this very carefully. However, I would argue that this bill is more than just calling for a plan. I would point again to subclause 3(2) that says the government "shall" provide financial assistance".

It does not say the government should investigate the possibility of providing financial assistance. That small word "shall" implores the government, and quite frankly, I would argue, compels the government, if this bill were taken forward and enacted, to increase its financial expenditures, which of course is in contravention of any private member's bill.

Therefore, I would argue once again, Mr. Speaker, it will require a royal recommendation, because the bill is not asking for a plan, it is asking the government directly to provide additional funds to create and follow through with this national housing strategy.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Government House Leader and the member for Vancouver East for their submissions on this point. I will take them under consideration and come back to the House with a ruling in due course.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

INDIAN OIL AND GAS ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-5, An Act to amend the Indian Oil and Gas Act, as reported with amendment from the committee.

[*English*]

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: There is one motion in amendment standing on the notice paper for the report stage of Bill C-5.

[*Translation*]

Motion No. 1 will not be selected by the Chair, because it requires a royal recommendation.

• (1545)

[*English*]

There being no motions at report stage the House will now proceed without debate to the putting of the question on the motion to concur in the bill at report stage.

Hon. Gerry Ritz (for the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development) moved that the bill, as amended, be concurred in.

(Motion agreed to)

The Speaker: When shall the bill be read a third time? By leave, now?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Gerry Ritz moved that the bill be read a third time and passed.

Mr. John Duncan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is indeed very gratifying to see Bill C-5 advanced to third reading. After nearly a decade of discussions and consultations, we are finally bringing this legislation into the 21st century. In the process, we will be helping to bring much needed prosperity to oil and gas producing first nations.

This long overdue bill is an important step forward in levelling the playing field for resource-rich first nations that face obstacles to achieving their full economic potential. I remind my hon. colleagues that the Indian Oil and Gas Act has remained unchanged for the past 34 years. To say that Bill C-5 is long overdue, is an understatement. That is why I am so proud to be taking part in corrective action with this legislation to set first nations on a better course for the future.

As I pointed out, the last time I spoke on Bill C-5, this is a concrete example of the Conservative government's commitment to ensure that aboriginal Canadians fully share in economic opportunities. It is an important building block that will enable first nations with oil and gas reserves to build stronger, more reliant communities that can better manage their own affairs. The oil and gas sector represents a source of promising economic development opportunities for first nations. The Government of Canada, through its special operating agency Indian Oil and Gas Canada, currently manages over 1,000 oil and gas producing wells and about 150 new wells are drilled on reserves each year.

In 2005-06 over \$270 million in oil and gas revenues were collected by the Government of Canada on behalf of first nations. More than \$1 billion in revenues from on reserve oil and gas activity has been collected by Indian Oil and Gas Canada on behalf of about 60 first nations over the past five years. That revenue is then passed on, in its entirety, to those first nations communities. This much needed source revenue is being used by these first nations for training, new housing, water and sewer projects, initiatives that are building stronger communities and a brighter future for their children.

Notwithstanding the current economic downturn, industry remains committed to developing partnerships with first nations. The oil and gas sector is continuing to invest hundreds of millions of dollars in exploration and exploitation activities on first nations reserve lands, more than \$300 million worth over the last five years alone. While there is great promise, the potential for first nations economic opportunities in the oil and gas sector is dependent upon industry investment.

Government Orders

Private sector interests lament that up until now federal laws governing development activity on reserves have not kept up with industry needs. They also complain that the regulations are unclear in many cases, which can cause delays, additional costs and lost investment opportunities. Industry stakeholders clearly prefer to invest in lands where the regulatory regimes are certain and where communities offer opportunities, not challenges. That is precisely what this bill would provide.

Let me review the many progressive features in Bill C-5 that would ensure first nations lands are every bit as attractive to investors as off reserve lands.

First, the act increases clarity. The amendments clarify both ministerial and judicial oversight powers in high-risk areas such as levying of fines and searches and seizures. Another way that Bill C-5 would clarify would be by harmonizing federal legislation with provincial regimes. This is important because provincial oil and gas laws related to conservation and environmental protection are amended from time to time. If the federal regime does not stay abreast of these changes, it puts first nations seeking investment at a clear disadvantage.

● (1550)

The incorporation by reference of these amendments would ensure the federal regime would keep pace. More to the point, it would eliminate disparities between on and off-reserve lands. Again, this would provide greater certainty for potential investors and facilitate economic development. All of this would be done while, in all circumstances, fully maintaining the federal government's fiduciary responsibilities to first nations.

The second major advantage of Bill C-5 is that it would improve Canada's ability to regulate oil and gas activities on reserve land. Bill C-5 would give the minister, through Indian Oil and Gas Canada, greater authority to audit operators and collect royalties owed to first nations. Once developed, new regulations will establish a clear set of rules to prevent companies from using certain transactions with subsidiaries or related parties to unduly reduce royalties payable to first nations.

Furthermore, the minister would have a 10-year limitation period to commence legal actions to collect unpaid royalties and other amounts owing. This is especially important. There would be no limitation period in cases of fraud or misrepresentation. Without this provision, provincial standards would apply and in some cases the limitation period would be as low as two years. This added protection would ensure that first nations were paid what they were rightfully due.

The final major area of improvement made possible by Bill C-5 concerns environmental protection and ensuring that first nation sites of cultural, spiritual or historical significance will be protected from potentially adverse effects of oil and gas activities. Because the federal regime would be harmonized with provincial environmental protection laws, new enforcement actions to protect the environment from oil and gas activities would be identical to the ones currently available to the province off reserve.

The minister would also be provided new powers to suspend operations if first nation sites of cultural, spiritual or historical

significance were discovered or threatened by the oil and gas activities. Oil and gas activities would only be permitted to resume when the minister would be confident that the risk of harm would no longer exist. In addition, the regulations could require first nation concurrence before these operations are resumed.

Another important change in this legislation responds directly to the priorities of first nations. The concern was raised repeatedly that the on-reserve regime did not keep pace with the off-reserve regime. To address this need, the amendments would expand the authority of the governor in council to make regulations and to facilitate regular improvements to them. In fact, the approach taken by Bill C-5 would guarantee continuous changes and improvements to ensure that the federal oil and gas regime would remain current.

Under the act, regulations would be monitored, examined and, when required, amended on a never-ending basis. This means that first nations would never again have to wait for 30 or 35 years before amendments to modernize the act could be implemented.

This is another aspect following on the act in which first nations will play a crucial role. We will continue to work together with oil and gas first nations and their advocate, the Indian Resource Council, during the development of the regulations, just as we did during the development of this act.

I remind the House that before developing the bill, extensive consultations were carried out with first nations with oil and gas interests. Since 2003, Indian Oil and Gas Canada has held one-on-one sessions with over 85% of the oil and gas-producing first nations.

My hon. colleagues can rest assured that passage of this legislation is not the end, but merely a continuation of an ongoing consultation process with first nations. That is not rhetoric. That is a promise.

● (1555)

During the minister's appearance before committee, he mentioned a letter of comfort which he sent to the Indian Resource Council last year. I should explain that the Indian Resource Council is a national aboriginal organization that advocates on behalf of some 130 first nations with oil and gas production or the potential for production.

In writing, the minister outlined Canada's commitment to modernize the on-reserve oil and gas regime. He also committed to continue our partnership with the Indian Resource Council during the development of the regulations. Of concern to many, the minister reassured oil and gas first nations that there was nothing in Bill C-5 that affected first nations' jurisdiction over their resources. Nor did the act extend the jurisdiction of the provinces to those lands or resources.

*Government Orders***GOVERNMENT ORDERS***[English]***INDIAN OIL AND GAS ACT**

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-5, An Act to amend the Indian Oil and Gas Act, be read the third time and passed.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I commend the government for bringing forward this act. It is long overdue. I come from a jurisdiction where oil and gas is a huge part of the income for the province. One of the big vacuums has been the proper regulation of oil and gas activity on first nation lands. I commend the government for finally coming forward with a more modernized system.

I raised this question in the briefing the government provided, which I appreciated. When will the regulations come forward? In addition to the consultation with the first nations, which is appropriate and constitutionally required, will the government also consult with additional concerned people, including people living adjacent to the first nation communities who could potentially be impacted by either air emissions or contamination of water from the oil and gas activity? Will they also be consulted in the development of the regulations?

• (1600)

Mr. John Duncan: Madam Speaker, I know that the regulatory process is going to involve a lot of consultation between the government and the Indian Resource Council. Producing first nations are very much a part of this exercise and I would assume that they are good neighbours.

I would assume that the fact that we are incorporating so much provincial legislation by reference would mean that the standard that would be applied would be very similar to what is currently applied, and that the level of consultation and advice is what is acceptable in the neighbourhood.

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank the parliamentary secretary for his comments here this afternoon.

One of the topics that he touched on, and that I would ask that he expand on a bit, is the whole notion that the modernization of the act, in respect to this bill, would in fact ensure that the fiduciary relationship that is enjoyed between the Government of Canada and first nations is upheld; and second, that this bill would not in any way inhibit or change the important treaty and aboriginal rights that exist currently. I wonder if he could comment further on those two points.

Mr. John Duncan: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the question from the chair of the aboriginal affairs committee, which has been seized with getting this bill through the House.

Indian Oil and Gas Canada is responsible for managing and administering exploration and development on first nations lands. They are carried out under the direction and with the approval of first nations band councils. They are mandated to fulfill the Crown's fiduciary and statutory obligations.

The minister reiterated that it was the Government of Canada and not provincial authorities that would be responsible for managing first nation lands and resources. The letter of comfort also addressed first nation concerns related to value-added opportunities. For example, the minister pledged to establish first nation energy business centres of excellence in Alberta and in Saskatchewan.

Furthermore, the minister committed to identifying opportunities for greater first nations input and involvement in the decision-making processes at Indian Oil and Gas Canada on issues that directly affected them. As well, he signalled his willingness to explore options for greater first nations control over the management of their oil and gas resources. Of great interest to us as legislators, the minister promised to establish a continuous change or improvement process.

These assurances reinforce our government's determination to ensure first nations share equally in our country's prosperity. Members of government believe profoundly that first nations citizens must participate fully in all that Canada has to offer and be given the tools to achieve greater economic self-reliance and an ever-increasing quality of life. Bill C-5 would help to advance these goals by providing modern legislation, competitive regulations and sound practices that would create the conditions for economic success and social progress.

These goals are shared by all members of the House. The key to unleashing this potential lies in passing this modernized legislative framework into law. By endorsing Bill C-5, we will be confirming, once again, that collaboration and partnership between the federal government, the private sector and aboriginal people can lead to a better future. Indeed, it will help build a better country for us all.

I call on all parties to lend their support and ensure the speedy passage of this necessary and overdue legislation.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS*[English]***COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE**

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE CANADIAN MISSION IN AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Madam Speaker, I believe you would find consent for the following travel motion: I move:

That, in relation to its order of reference of February 10, 2009, 12 members of the Special Committee on the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan be authorized to travel to Washington, D.C. from April 22 to 23, 2009 and that the necessary staff accompany the committee.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Does the hon. minister have unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): 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)

Government Orders

Regarding the issue of Canada's fiduciary obligations, the federal government has committed that the fiduciary relationship will not diminish and will continue unchanged. In fact, the proposed changes actually strengthen Canada's ability to express its fiduciary obligations because of the clarity in the bill in terms of specific legislative and regulatory capacity, so that will allow us to fulfill our role much more efficiently.

The aboriginal and treaty rights of first nations are clearly unaffected by the provisions of the bill. They remain the same.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the bill provides that the minister may make regulations, and there are some 25 or 26 different areas under which regulations are referred to, so I am sure that they are going to be there.

There are some provisos whereby if there are any inconsistencies between federal and provincial regulations, the federal regulations will prevail as they relate to any other acts which are incorporated by reference in the regulations.

I wanted to ask the member if he could give the House an estimate of the time it is going to take before such regulations are going to be able to be put together because it appears from the breadth of what is happening right across the country, and with different regulations for different provinces, that this may be a very onerous task and may raise some interesting questions.

I would also ask whether or not there has been any thought given to having any of these regulations presented for comment to the appropriate standing committee?

• (1605)

Mr. John Duncan: Madam Speaker, at this point the committee has not been seized by that question. That could be a question that the committee might want to deal with.

The area in which Bill C-5 provides incorporation by reference of provincial legislation is actually quite limited, but it is that limited ability which allows us to incorporate many very thick provincial pieces of legislation, very meaty stuff. Those areas are determining the quantity or quality of oil or gas recovered, combining oil or gas rates for joint exploitation, abandonment of wells, establishment of administrative fees for services provided, environmental protection from the effects of oil and gas exploration, oil and gas conservation, and equitable production.

Even though it looks like it is a huge task, I think most of this has already been pre-contemplated. There has been a technical committee working on this through Indian Oil and Gas Canada. I do not think this should be a long time coming.

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to be here today to debate Bill C-5 at third reading.

The Liberal Party has supported this particular bill and made efforts to improve it where it saw a need for improvement. Not all of them have been accepted either by the committee or the House, with the ruling by the Speaker that a particular motion relating to the fiduciary duty of the minister and the government was not accepted.

Bill C-5 has been a long time coming, as many in the House have already said. The bill was officially introduced in 1974 and has remained substantially unchanged and unamended since that

particular time. Efforts have been made in the past. There have been many discussions and consultations, and certainly many hours, days and weeks of work have taken place to get us where we are today.

In fact, this is the third time the bill has been introduced in as many sessions of Parliament and only now have we reached the third reading stage. Of course, there was a prorogation of the House, which everybody is aware of, last fall.

We all have to ask ourselves a question when it comes to pieces of legislation. Has there been adequate consultation? That is not a question that I can answer. It is only a question that can be answered by the first nations people, who are directly affected. In many regards, they have satisfied the committee that in fact extensive consultations have taken place.

There are, obviously, some organizations and first nations communities which have expressed some difficulty at committee around the specifics of this particular bill. In particular, the Stoney Nakoda First Nations out of Alberta has expressed a number of concerns with the bill around the fiduciary duty of the federal government, as to whether it would be changed or altered. It has also expressed certain concerns about the lack of control and jurisdiction of first nations over their own lands and the management of them.

That being said, it is important we understand that those concerns were noted prior to the development of the bill. Some have questioned whether these types of issues should have been raised in committee because the Stoney Nakoda, for instance, was already part of the consultations that took place with the Indian Resource Council of Canada, but that is the way our legislative process works. First nations have the ability to take advantage of whatever stage of the legislation to make their views known and I acknowledge that.

The bill came to the House as a result of the consultations between the Indian Resource Council of Canada, which represents 130 oil and gas producing first nations or those who have the potential to produce oil and gas, and the Government of Canada, primarily through Indian Oil and Gas Canada.

There is a need, of course, for this particular bill. It fills a regulatory gap and modernizes the Indian Oil and Gas Act. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development has already outlined some of those substantive changes.

I would like to review in broad terms some of the aspects of the clauses of this bill that deal with royalties and regulation making. There is an increase in the powers of the minister, but there is also a specific duty on the minister to consult with first nations in carrying out his powers and responsibilities. There are improvements to the inspection, audit and examination powers of the minister and Indian Oil and Gas Canada representing the minister. There are changes regarding search and seizure, delegation authorities, offences and punishment, as well as administrative monetary penalties.

One of the major discussions that took place in committee concerned the incorporation of provincial regulations. Basically, they would become federal regulations for the purposes of managing first nations lands that have oil and gas or the potential of oil and gas.

Government Orders

•(1610)

Some have argued that the government has to ensure that the rights and interests of first nations are not infringed upon by the incorporation of those provincial laws. People want to ensure that by incorporating these particular laws the fiduciary obligation is not diminished. Also raised was the issue that because this particular bill allows the government to incorporate provincial regulations and because it is a regulation-making bill, how do we really know what is going on. There was an amendment made to this bill at committee that would require the government to report to Parliament. Proposed section 28.1 reads:

At least every two years after the coming into force of the present section, the Minister shall prepare a report on the administration of this Act during the two preceding years and shall table a copy of the report in each House of Parliament within the first fifteen days that it is sitting after the completion of the report, which shall include a summary addressing the following matters:

- (a) the progress of the consultations mentioned in paragraph 6(1.1)(a) and a list of concerns raised during such consultations;
- (b) any proposed regulation to be made under subsection 6(1.1); and
- (c) any regulations made under this Act and describe any variations in the regulations from province to province.

It is quite an in-depth report on responsibility that was not originally in Bill C-5 that is there now as it has been reprinted.

It is important from our perspective that this bill pass in Parliament. It would provide some balance, some consistency between what will happen off reserve and what will happen on reserve as first nations develop their own lands where there is oil and gas or the potential for oil and gas. Some will argue that there will not be consistency right across the country because it will vary province to province.

My party is in favour of this piece of legislation. We have done our best to see it through its various legislative stages in a timely fashion.

Our party has supported in the past, it supports today and it will support in the future the right of first nations, aboriginal peoples generally, to develop their own lands and their own resources. We will support the inherent right of first nations to make decisions for themselves and for their people.

While this bill does not go all the way, it certainly goes part of the way to fulfilling those goals and aspirations.

•(1615)

Mr. John Duncan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Madam Speaker, I was asked a question about the regulations going forward from here. It has been pointed out to me that the regulations will come into effect in 2010, assuming that the bill is adopted.

There has been considerable consultation. Specifically referring to the speech by the member for Labrador, it is worthwhile to point out that since consultations started on the bill in 1999, 10 years ago, on Indian oil and gas, the committee has heard testimony during 40 technical committee meetings on various amendments proposed to the bill. There have been 22 Indian Oil and Gas Canada co-management board meetings at which there has been further discussion on the bill. There have been numerous other opportunities and engagements since then at the Indian Resource Council annual

meetings, tribal council meetings and symposia where the bill was discussed.

We have a consensus document from 130 first nations. I think everyone should be quite cognizant of the fact that there can always be more discussion, but in order to reap the benefits of the legislation, it is time to move on.

I would ask my colleague from Labrador if he does not subscribe to that same point of view at this point. Ten years of consultations and the amount of dialogue that has gone on regarding the bill, really we are at the point where we need to move forward.

Mr. Todd Russell: Madam Speaker, there is no doubt there have been extensive discussions. There have been tens, if not hundreds, of meetings relative to this particular bill or the Indian Oil and Gas Act generally.

The parliamentary secretary is probably right that we can sometimes disagree on the level of consultations or what constitutes consultations.

However, I believe that we would not be here today discussing Bill C-5 at third reading if generally all of the stakeholders did not agree that we had arrived at a point where adequate talks and consultations had taken place.

It is my sense that while there is give and take in any type of consultation and negotiation, we have arrived at a bill which parties can accept. We heard in committee, for instance, that Indian Oil and Gas Canada might have sought various changes or various things to be added in or taken out. The Indian Resource Council of Canada has also testified that it may have looked for stronger language in certain areas or for a clause to be put in or a clause to be taken out. However, both parties have indicated that there was compromise.

We, in the Liberal Party, are satisfied that it is a compromise bill. It is not perfect, but it will achieve certain objectives, such as facilitating the development of oil and gas on reserve, giving first nations a hand up, and providing more clarity regarding the regulatory regime.

We will be supporting the bill as we have throughout the legislative process thus far.

•(1620)

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, our party is supporting the bill. Obviously the bill has gone through a lot of consultation which is the most important thing. On the consultation and accommodation of the first nation input, it seems that there was a lot of effort in that regard.

Perhaps the member could clarify something for me. A bill was just tabled in the House supposedly updating the penalties for most of the federal environmental statutes. It imposes a maximum \$6 million fine for corporate offenders, yet in this bill the maximum penalty is \$100,000.

Could the member clarify why when it comes to Indian lands the penalties are much lower?

Government Orders

Mr. Todd Russell: Madam Speaker, that is a very interesting question. It is one on which I cannot provide a direct answer. It is something I would not mind discussing with the member and also seek clarity from the Government of Canada on that particular point.

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank the member opposite for his comments and his and his party's support for this important bill.

The member will know through the course of our discussions in committee that one of the features that was discussed about Bill C-5 was the notion that this bill in fact builds a foundation for a continuous improvement regarding the needs that first nations communities would have going forward, knowing that the landscape in the energy business is going to change in the future. This bill would, at the very least, enable a building of a foundation for that going forward.

I wonder if he could comment on the extent to which he believes this bill gives us that ability.

Mr. Todd Russell: Madam Speaker, this bill does accommodate that particular scenario. I believe that witnesses at committee and those who were involved in the consultations on and the drafting of this piece of legislation understood that conditions could change and could change rapidly, as with the current economic conditions in which we find our country and the world.

The government has committed, and we can only hope that the government will honour its commitment, to a process of ongoing change so that we will not get caught in a legislative time warp where there is something that was established 20 or 30 years ago, but we are dealing with a much more current set of circumstances. This is a positive development. It speaks to the duty of the minister to consult with first nations and Indian bands as we go forward.

There was a letter of comfort provided. Some people think that letters of comfort are not as strong as something that can be written in legislation, but at least there is something on the record that talks about the minister's commitment to engage in an ongoing process of evolving regulations and, where possible, maybe even legislation to adapt to the changes to first nations and the oil and gas producing first nations.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, one of the regulations that the minister may make has to do with the hiring of residents on the first nations lands. There is a qualification in the direction that indicates "to the extent that it is practicable and reasonably efficient, safe and economical to do so" that they would be hired.

Can the member advise whether or not this is a significant issue with regard to employing first nations people on the reserve lands which are adjacent to the properties for development of oil and gas?

• (1625)

Mr. Todd Russell: Madam Speaker, it is an important clause to have in the bill because it directs companies to hire first nations people who are qualified and best able to meet the standards of the industry. There is an understanding within first nations themselves that there are capacity issues and that there are issues around education.

I believe it is incumbent upon the government to make sure that first nations have the resources to ensure that the people are educated and trained. Obviously we deal with issues of poverty. This raises a very good point. It is simple to put something in the bill and say that is what we are going to do, but there are always extenuating circumstances and an environment which must also be improved in order for us to meet that particular goal.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Before the resumption of debate, it is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Madawaska—Restigouche, Agriculture and Agri-food; the hon. member for Brossard—La Prairie, Forestry Industry.

The hon. member for Gatineau has the floor to resume debate.

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to say right away that the Bloc Québécois is in favour of Bill C-5, An Act to amend the Indian Oil and Gas Act.

Although imperfect, the bill will provide the tools needed to harmonize the laws and regulations on reserve lands with those that apply in the provinces in which the reserves are located. During study in committee, the Bloc Québécois asked for further clarification of the terms and conditions surrounding the authorization to issue replacement leases for lands added to reserves and subsequently of the permits granted by the federal government for oil and gas exploration or exploitation.

As a result of the work done in committee, the Bloc Québécois does not think that the bill needs any amendments. In addition, the bill is the result of a consultation procedure the government conducted through Indian Oil and Gas Canada and with the cooperation of the Indian Resource Council, which consulted most of the oil and gas producing first nations as well as 130 band councils in 2002 and 2003.

This bill is the product, therefore, of a consensus of the 130 members of the Indian Resource Council and any amendments to it would require another period of consultations.

That being said, the Government of Canada should not use Bill C-5 to avoid its fiduciary responsibility for first nations. It is incumbent upon the government to correct the inequalities between aboriginals and non-aboriginals.

To be sure we are talking about the right thing, I will provide a summary of the bill.

The bill amends the Indian Oil and Gas Act to clarify and expand the existing regulation-making powers and to add new ones, particularly with respect to licences, permits and leases for the exploration and exploitation of oil and gas on reserve lands and the determination and payment of oil and gas royalties. It also puts in place sanctions for contraventions of the act as well as provisions for its enforcement.

In order for us to fully grasp the scope of the bill and the need for it, I would like to provide a bit of the historical background that brought us to this point.

Government Orders

For more than 20 years, studies and discussions have been going on to establish a new financial relationship between the first nations and the Government of Canada.

Already in 1983, the report of the House of Commons' Special Committee on Indian Self-Government, the Penner report, recommended that the fiscal relationship between the Government of Canada and the first nations should be redefined.

In 1996, the final report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, which was also known as the Erasmus-Dussault Commission, as you will recall, also recommended a full review of the fiscal relationship between the federal government and the first nations. The proposed initiative focused on redefining this relationship within a broader context based on first nations self-government. The Tlicho self-government act is an example of this.

The First Nations Oil and Gas and Moneys Management Act, which came into effect on April 1, 2006, just over three years ago now, was one of the first steps in this new fiscal relationship between the first nations and the federal government.

This optional law contains two new provisions: the first makes it possible for first nations to manage and regulate oil and gas activities on reserves; the second, to manage funds held in trust for them by Canada.

● (1630)

A first nation can choose either option. In other words, it need not own oil or gas to become responsible for managing these monies.

This legislation will change the way oil and gas are developed, and it will allow first nations able to do so to develop these resources on their own land. Previously, first nations had to comply with the Indian Oil and Gas Act and its regulations, which did not allow them to manage these resources directly.

The First Nations Oil and Gas and Moneys Management Act allows first nations that choose to do so to be excluded from the application of the Indian Oil and Gas Act and its regulations.

That act, the Indian Oil and Gas Act, is the legislation governing exploration and exploitation of oil and gas resources on reserve land. This legislation does not allow first nations to manage the oil and gas resources on their land directly, nor does it allow them to develop an appropriate regulatory framework.

As I said, the First Nations Oil and Gas and Moneys Management Act is a very important legislative measure. Since 2006, it has allowed first nations, if they so choose, to create regulations concerning oil and gas exploration and conservation, on the spending of moneys derived from the exploitation of these resources, and on the protection of the environment.

As for regulations to protect the environment, those established by first nations will have to at least meet the standards of Quebec or the province in which the aboriginal community is located.

In terms of managing their finances, those first nations choosing to come under this new legislative framework will be subject to different regulations regarding "Indian moneys". This is currently defined in the Indian Act as all moneys collected, received or held by Her Majesty for the use and benefit of Indians or bands.

For these first nations, the provisions of the Indian Act will no longer apply. They will therefore be able to manage the amounts collected directly, rather than letting them be managed by the federal government. As a result, they will be able to make their own choices for investment in their communities instead of letting the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development dictate priorities to them. Auditor General Sheila Fraser pointed out in her 2004 report that this department is not doing a good job of administering the billions of dollars intended for the aboriginal communities.

If a first nation does not feel it would be advantageous to come under the new legislative regime, the current standards will continue to apply to it, so it will continue to benefit from the provisions of the Indian Act, including those that apply to the administration of Indian moneys.

Bill C-5, which is incidentally identical to Bill C-63 and Bill C-5, which died on the order paper June 17, 2008, and December 3, 2008, respectively, amends the Indian Oil and Gas Act. It is important to point out that oil is defined in the act as "a mixture of hydrocarbons that can be recovered from a well in liquid form, with the exception of condensate".

● (1635)

At present, the First Nations that have oil and gas resources but do not manage them under the 2006 act must leave the management of those resources to Indian Oil and Gas Canada (IOGC), a government agency which reports to the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs.

IOGC is mandated to manage and administer the exploration and exploitation of oil and natural gas resources on Indian reserve land. IOGC promotes their development and ensures that royalties are appropriately paid to the first nations. However the Indian Oil and Gas Act has not been amended since it was passed in 1974. It is true that the Indian Oil and Gas Regulations of 1995 have been passed, but those regulations are inadequate to deal with the evolution of the market since 1974.

Faced with an increasingly complex industry, the provinces have constantly modernized their oil and gas legislation. That is why the federal government is today deciding to modernize the act, so as to bring it more in line with reality and the various legislative enactments of the provinces.

This bill will apply to reserves that were not granted rights under the First Nations Oil and Gas and Moneys Management Act. Hence it will apply to the first nations that are subject to the Indian Oil and Gas Act. Some 200 first nations produce or could produce oil and gas. At this time over 80% of this type of activity takes place, as one might guess, in Alberta. In 2005-06, over \$270 million in oil and gas revenue was collected by IOGC on behalf of about 60 first nations that are signatories of development agreements in effect.

Government Orders

The purpose of the bill is to level the playing field between these industries' on-reserve and off-reserve activities with the support of provincial legislation, in order to: reduce barriers to the economic development of the first nations; guarantee environmental protection on the reserves, something that is extremely important; and allow the government to better fulfill its industry management obligations to first nations through regulatory compliance and through the collection of royalties and other forms of applicable compensation.

Under the Indian Act, oil and gas revenues are collected by the federal government for subsequent full redistribution to the peoples concerned. These revenues are defined in the act as "Indian moneys", and from them flows the federal government's responsibility as trustee.

This bill does not have the effect of transferring the federal government's power of management and administration of the exploration and production of oil and gas resources on first nations reserve land. Its purpose is to update the Indian Oil and Gas Act and to harmonize the federal act with legislation in the provinces where first nations communities are located.

This incorporation of provincial laws and regulations will in no way either detract from or add to provincial jurisdiction, as for example with the harmonization of reserve environmental plans with provincial requirements.

• (1640)

The bill replaces almost all of the provisions of the existing six-section Indian Oil and Gas Act and includes a number of matters that are currently provided for in the Indian Oil and Gas Regulations, 1995.

Bill C-5 expands the Governor in Council's existing regulation-making powers and adds new ones, particularly with respect to licences, permits and leases for the exploration and exploitation of oil and gas on reserve lands. The bill also makes changes in respect of the limitation period for actions to collect amounts owing and the determination of royalty payments.

It puts in place sanctions for contraventions of the act as well as provisions for its enforcement comprising fines and penalties, a remedy for trespass, environmental protection clauses and authority to issue replacement leases for lands added to reserves.

It would be interesting to have more information about lands added to reserves and to know what measures are being put forward in negotiations with the provinces. For example, what is meant by expanding the Governor in Council's regulation-making powers and how will the provinces be consulted before regulations are introduced? Even though the bill states that these lands have been absolutely surrendered under the Indian Act or the First Nations Land Management Act, it would be interesting to get some clarification about the negotiation process with the provinces and obtaining a permit on these added lands.

The bill also requires the minister to undertake ongoing consultations with the first nations involved with respect to negotiations with industry. The new section 6(1.1) states that: The Governor in Council may, by regulation:

(a) require that a power of the Minister under this Act in relation to first nation lands be exercised only if prior approval of the council of the first nation is

obtained, if the council is first consulted or if prior notice is given to the council, as the case may be;

(b) require that any such power of the Minister be exercised only if prior consent is given by any first nation member who is in lawful possession of the first nation lands; and

(c) require that notice be given to the council of the first nation after the Minister exercises any such power.

As far as consultations prior to introduction of the bill are concerned, we need to know that through Indian Oil and Gas Canada, and in cooperation with the Indian Resource Council, the government consulted most oil-producing first nations and 130 band councils in 2002 and 2003.

The Indian Resource Council was founded in 1987 to represent first nations' collective oil and gas interests with both government and industry. More than 130 first nations in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, New Brunswick and the Northwest Territories are members. Six non-producing first nations in Quebec are also members: the Odanak Abenakis; the Natashquan Innus; the Kanasatake Mohawks; the Gesgapegiag Micmacs; the Kahnawake Mohawks; and the Wôlinak Abenakis.

Some Indian Resource Council members are dissatisfied with certain aspects of the bill, but on the whole, the council is happy with the bill and the consultations that took place.

• (1645)

Our position—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I am sorry to have to interrupt the hon. member, but his time has expired.

Are there any questions or comments?

Resuming debate.

The hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan has the floor.

[*English*]

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak to this legislation before the House today.

I want to give some context around the bill. One of the reasons this bill has come before the House is the fact that the original act has had little change since 1974. We know that, in many cases, the provincial legislation has changed but the federal legislation has simply failed to keep pace.

As other members have pointed out, when changes to the Indian Oil and Gas Act were contemplated, consultations were held with the first nations players who were involved in the oil and gas sector. One of the things we the committee heard was that most of the first nations that were involved did support the process but that there were a couple of first nations that raised significant concerns. In my speech today, I will touch on some of those concerns.

What we learned about the consultation process was that although it was inclusive in terms of providing information, taking it out to tribal councils and getting feedback, one of the challenges with the consultation process was that the scope of the bill was limited to begin with, which prevented some of the changes that some of the first nations were proposing.

Government Orders

Despite those shortcomings, the NDP is supporting the bill because it is a good first step in amending the legislation. I am hopeful that some of the concerns that were raised by some of the first nations do get taken into consideration, both in the regulatory process and perhaps in some further amendments to the bill down the road.

I will now touch on some of the concerns. One of the concerns raised by the Stoney Nakoda Nation was around the regulations. What we see in this legislation is that most of what will be dealt with actually be dealt with in the regulatory process. Although there is a process around developing regulations, gazetting regulations and getting input, it does not require the oversight of this House or of a committee.

Some concerns have been raised about that. I want to quote from the Stoney Nakoda response around the regulation because these words say it far better than I could. The Stoney Nakoda state:

In a comparison of Bill C-5 to either of the federal government's Canada Petroleum Resources Act or Alberta's Mines and Minerals Act one will immediately notice that Bill C-5 has left for the discretion of the Governor in Council the ability to prescribe by Regulation many of the specific rights and powers that are specifically provided for with the aforementioned legislation. While a specific example is the right to cancel a lease, which is found at section 105 of the Canada Petroleum Resources Act or at section 45 of the Mines and Minerals Act, other examples include the right to take royalties in kind, the sale of the royalty interest, continuations of leases, etc. All of these are enumerated rights or powers within other legislative schemes while in Bill C-5 these are discretionary matters.

It goes on to state:

Additional powers that are typically within the body of the Act and not just matters to be dealt with by Regulations include the power of the Minister to assess, reassess and recalculate royalties that are due from the lessor; appeal provisions, etc. While Bill C-5 has numerous provisions respecting fines and penalties, these basic, yet critical powers have been left to be dealt with by the Regulations.

That is a fairly serious concern that has been raised because for non-first nations, we have a complex, detailed act that outlines many of the things that are being left to the regulatory process for first nations. I wonder why we would say that non-first nation Canadians will have legislation that is comprehensive and has the oversight of the House versus first nations that must deal with the regulatory process.

In light of the concerns raised by the Stoney Nakoda and others, the NDP proposed an amendment that was accepted by the committee and subsequently put into the bill. It called for more oversight. I will not read the whole amendment that was accepted but it states in part, "...prepare a report on the administration of this Act during the two preceding years and shall table a copy of the report in each House of Parliament within the first fifteen days...". It goes on to outline a couple of other things.

We felt strongly about the fact that there was not an ability to include many of the proposals that the Stoney Nakoda and others were making in the legislation and, because of the very narrow scope of the bill, that it was important that the House have oversight. With that amendment, it will allow us to take a closer look at how the act is being implemented and how regulations are being developed.

• (1650)

The Stoney Nakoda Nation raised a number of issues but I will only speak to two of them. It raised the issue around the obligations of having a body that has two responsibilities. It states:

The regulator acts in a quasi-judicial role and adjudicates and regulates the relationship between the various stakeholders. Since Bill C-5 does not clearly distinguish between these two roles, Canada's obligation to First Nations are effectively reduced.

In Alberta, the Department of Energy administers and manages Alberta's oil and gas interests through the Mines and Minerals Act while the Energy Resources Conservation Board adjudicates and regulates the development of the resources through the provisions of the Oil and Gas Conservation Act. Similarly, Canada's own northern and offshore oil and gas resources are administered and managed under the Canada Petroleum Resources Act while the National Energy Board adjudicates and regulates the development of the resources through the Canada Oil and Gas Operations Act.

We can see in two separate levels of government that are separate bodies that have different goals and responsibilities. Bill C-5 does not address that for first nations. Again we wonder why non-first nations would have this function that is taken apart so that there is not any conflict of interest. This was simply outside the scope of the bill that was presented to us, so we were not able to amend it to include those aspects that the Stoney Nakoda raised.

Another very troubling issue was raised when the committee was hearing testimony but because it was outside of the scope of the bill we could not propose amendments.

In an article back in February, entitled "Trust policy hurts reserves", it directly goes to the heart of the ability of a first nation to manage its own funds, to invest in economic development and to address some of the poverty issues that face many first nations communities. This court ruling that came out highlighted some of the challenges facing first nations when it comes to the management of their own funds. This article states:

Twenty years ago, the Ermineskin and Samson First Nations in Alberta began the most costly legal battle in Canadian history and now it has come to a crashing end.

They went all the way to the Supreme Court and in the end, the court sided with the government. The case, which cost the bands legal fees in excess of \$100 million, was launched more than 20 years ago over the federal government's mishandling of their trust funds. The two bands alleged they had lost close to \$2 billion in investment revenue because the Department of Indian Affairs had held the money in trust without any investment.

Later on in the article it states:

The money placed in trust earned Bank of Canada savings interest rate, which averaged around three to six per cent. The Government of Canada then used the money as a part of its consolidated revenue fund. Indian monies became a cheap source of revenue for Canadian governments.

But in the end, the Supreme Court sided with the government. They stated the Department of Indian Affairs had followed the Indian Act. Unfortunately the court made the decision because the Indian Act is the only piece of legislation the department has to follow when handling First Nations funds.

This issue did come before the committee. It was raised by the Stoney Nakoda and by the Montana First Nations. It is a very serious issue but, again, it was outside the scope of the bill to actually deal with that. The problem we are facing is that the federal government has a fiduciary responsibility. What happened in this case is that the government managed these royalties on behalf of first nations communities.

Private Members' Business

In the case that we are talking about, although the investments are significantly different now, we knew at the time that the federal government was investing the money at significantly higher rates of return. It paid the first nations the minimum amount it was required to and then invested the rest of the money and made far more money. The federal government benefited from the first nations royalty money, which simply unacceptable.

Although some of the responses were that first nations had an opportunity under other legislation to take over management of it, the fact was that the government had a responsibility to those communities to share that money in a much more reasonable way. Although the Supreme Court had to side with the government simply because of the Indian Act, it does not make it morally right, fair or just.

• (1655)

I am hopeful, because the light has now been shone on this kind of practice, we will see some changes that ensure first nations directly benefit from the resources on their own lands.

The NDP will be supporting the legislation and monitoring very closely, through the amendment proposed by the NDP, which was accepted.

Mr. John Duncan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened to the member's speech with great interest.

There was a fair amount of comment on the case that went to the Supreme Court. I point out that its final decision was important from the standpoint that not only did it not find fault with the government, but in a seven to zero decision, the court said that the government had no authority to invest the money in the way it was contemplated by the legal suit.

Indeed, we are trying to modernize this whole regime so first nations can have full benefit of their oil and gas resources. That is why the we wanted to get the legislation through. That is why we have the First Nations Oil and Gas and Moneys Management Act, which will allow first nations to manage their own moneys as well, if they so chose to do that. This has been rather well thought out and we see major progress.

I also add that we have this continuous change process to which this bill commits us.

Does the member agree that the accumulation of various measures represents major progress and addresses the concerns she has expressed in her comments?

Ms. Jean Crowder: Madam Speaker, the parliamentary secretary is absolutely right. It was a seven to zero Supreme Court decision. However, the issue is a deeply flawed Indian Act.

He is quite right. Even if the Supreme Court had wanted to rule in favour, it would have been bound by legislation, which I would agree is out of date, in fact, ancient.

If we were to contemplate amending or doing away with the Indian Act, I referred earlier to the consultation process. There were certainly some benefits in the current consultation process, but the trick always is the kind of a mandate the federal government provides to first nations to operate within that consultation process.

In this legislation we could not address the issues that were raised around the court case simply because the scope of the bill was far too limited. The Stoney Nakoda pointed out the fact that although the two nations lost their Supreme Court cases, there were a number of other court cases around the mishandling of royalties.

This is an opportunity for the government to examine that part of the Indian Act and make changes to it, which would benefit the first nations communities. The government benefits from those resources.

• (1700)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, does the member have any thoughts or comments as to why it has taken so long for the bill to get to this point?

Ms. Jean Crowder: Madam Speaker, that is a very good point. When we deal with first nations, Métis and Inuit, we often see the wheels of government grind exceedingly slow. I just read a report by the Auditor General on treaty land entitlement. She talks about the fact that first nations in Saskatchewan and Manitoba often wait up to a decade to get access to land to which they are entitled.

Since 1974, this legislation has not had the kinds of changes that are required, given what has changed in provincial legislation. As well, the scope of the bill is very narrow. More changes are required, but we had to deal with the particular mandate with which we were faced.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the third time and passed)

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I ask that you see the clock at 5:30 p.m.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private member's bill as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

SECURE, ADEQUATE, ACCESSIBLE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING ACT

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP) moved that Bill C-304, An Act to ensure secure, adequate, accessible and affordable housing for Canadians, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Private Members' Business

She said: Madam Speaker, first, I would like to thank the member for Halifax for seconding the bill. The member is new in the House, but before she arrived here, she already had a terrific record of working in Halifax with anti-poverty organizations and for housing. Her presence is very welcomed in the House. She is a great advocate not only in Halifax, but across the country. She is also our housing critic. I am very proud she has seconded my bill and has been very supportive to get the word and information out about the bill. We think it is a pretty darned good bill.

When I was first elected to the House in 1997, one of the key issues I brought forward, as the member for Vancouver East, was the critical need for social housing and for affordable housing, not only in Vancouver but across the country. That seems like a long time ago. I feel we have had so many steps going backwards and only a few baby steps going forward.

I want to begin my comments about my bill by pointing out that Canada used to have a sterling record when it came to the provision of affordable housing. We had many good federal programs, whether it was for co-op housing, social housing or special needs housing. There were great programs through CMHC during the 1970s and the 1980s, even going back to the end of the second world war when the vets' housing was built in cities across the country. The federal government always had an incredibly strong presence in the provision of housing. It was seen as a responsible mandate of the federal government.

Regrettably, that all changed in the early 1990s, when a then Liberal government decided that it wanted to get out of the housing business. Ever since then, it has been an unfolding disaster across the country. Therefore, many of us today now represent communities where we see the travesty of growing homelessness. People are sleeping on the streets or living with housing insecurity. Working families cannot afford rents. Seniors are very insecure in their housing. The situation has deteriorated for people with disabilities and certainly for the aboriginal communities both on-reserve and off-reserve. That is all because of public policy. It was deliberate public policy to end those housing programs and offload it to the provinces. As a result, we have seen a dramatic increase in homelessness and lack of housing security.

As it stands today, about three million Canadian households live in housing insecurity, paying more than 30% of their income toward housing. That is the measure used by CMHC.

Canada is the only major country in the industrialized world without a national housing strategy. In fact, we have fallen far behind most other countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD, in our level of investment in affordable housing. We have one of the smallest social housing sectors now among developed countries. However, we still have tremendous expertise across the country in developing social housing and affordable housing.

We find that fewer Canadians are qualifying for the higher cost of home ownership. This issue really comes home to roost in an economic recession. People have failing mortgages. Some people's financing was arranged through sub-prime mortgages.

Over the years, we have seen a very piecemeal approach to housing. While we saw a few initiatives in the late 1990s toward a homelessness strategy, there was never a recognition by the previous government, or the current government, that this was a mandate of the federal government.

The bill before us today says to the federal government that we must develop that national housing strategy and that we should work in partnership with the provinces, territories, Quebec, first nations and municipalities. A great amount of expertise exists, but it needs federal leadership and an overall strategy to ensure the resource is fully developed.

My will bill speaks to that. It calls on the minister to convene discussions with the various stakeholders to develop such a national strategy to ensure there is adequate housing. In this day and age, where we see such severe problems, this is very critical.

• (1705)

I know that in Quebec there have been some really excellent programs developed. I do want to acknowledge the very good work that has been done there over the years. We often point to Quebec as an example of what can be done in the development of good social housing and co-op housing.

I am hoping that if this bill can move forward on second reading and into committee, that we will have the support from the government, certainly from Liberal members, many of whom have a great interest in this issue, and also from members of the Bloc Québécois.

I do want to make it clear that my intent and commitment, should it go through second reading and into committee, is to ensure that there is an amendment along the lines that would recognize the unique nature of the jurisdiction of the Government of Quebec with regard to social housing in Quebec, and notwithstanding any other provision of this act the Government of Quebec may choose to be exempted from the application of this act, and should the development of a national housing strategy cause to be created a transfer of funds to the provinces and territories, the Government of Quebec may choose to be exempted from the strategy, and notwithstanding any such decision shall receive in full any transfer payment arising from the implementation of the strategy.

Now we are not at that point yet because we are talking about the development of a plan and a strategy, but I did want to make it clear to my friends in the Bloc that we are hoping for their support, recognizing the unique nature of the jurisdiction of Quebec.

I also want to point out that there are many initiatives underway across the country. For example, this Saturday in Vancouver there is a grand march for housing. This is organized by the city-wide housing coalition. It is really a manifestation of the incredible anxiety that people are facing. Certainly, within low income communities, like the downtown eastside, groups like the Carnegie Community Action Project have done a lot of work to draw attention to the housing crisis in that neighbourhood, a neighbourhood that I represent as a member of Parliament.

Private Members' Business

This is now a crisis that has gone right across the city. It is affecting renters in the west end, in Kitsilano, Mount Pleasant, and South Vancouver. We have such a severe situation in Vancouver, with an almost zero vacancy rate, that people are now crying out for every level of government to see this as a key priority, not only socially in terms of providing for this most basic of human rights, the right to adequate shelter, but also as an economic stimulus. I cannot think of a better way to create good Canadian jobs than having a good investment in social housing.

In Vancouver, there is going to be a huge march with thousands of people in our city calling on all levels of government to work together. My bill today is an example and a reflection of what could be done if we have the will to do it.

I know that organizations like the Wellesley Institute and Michael Shapcott have done so much work on housing over the years. He has pointed out that hundreds of thousands who will experience homelessness this year will not get a single penny in desperately needed new programs and services. He again points out that three million Canadian households are precariously housed, which he calls a modern day record. He has expressed in his research, in the work that he does with organizations across the country, just how bad the situation is.

I think this is very alarming to people because we think of Canada as a wealthy country where these basic provisions of human needs can be met, and yet we have seen not only a growing gap between wealth and poverty but we have seen an abandonment of this most fundamental measure by the federal government.

We do think it is very important for the federal government to take up its responsibility as was called for by the UN Special Rapporteur on adequate housing. We have had visits by the UN rapporteur. He has issued reports that have in effect condemned Canada for the fact that it has not provided the kind of leadership for the provision of housing, particularly when it comes to aboriginal people.

• (1710)

I am very happy to read into the record statements made by the National Aboriginal Housing Association, which is an excellent organization that has done much work over the years to provide aboriginal housing. It points out:

Canada must put in place a National Housing Strategy; indigenous peoples must have a voice in developing such a strategy.

The proposed bill (C-304) includes a reference to, and a provision for, Aboriginal housing to be addressed, and calls for Aboriginal participation in developing a national strategy.

I would say that is absolutely right on. That is what the bill contains, so we are very pleased to see that the National Aboriginal Housing Association is supporting the bill.

We also received a letter from the mayor of Sudbury, John Rodriguez, who points out that he is pleased to lend his support to the bill and its objective, an effective housing strategy for Canada. He states in his letter:

Many years ago, the federal and provincial governments cooperated effectively to build affordable housing here in our community. Today, there is a crisis of homeless and housing stressed individuals and families in this city. The historic cooperation is needed again and the federal government has no real plan to address these challenges.

There it is. He hit the nail right on the head. There is no plan to address this crisis, whether it is in Sudbury, Vancouver, Halifax, Montreal or Toronto, which I know has had severe housing issues.

There is no question that this is something that is urgently needed.

During the last few years, we have seen some incredible leadership at the municipal level. We have seen municipalities go the distance using zoning, municipal land and incentives to develop social housing.

However, without the partnership of the federal government, without clear objectives laid out, as we used to have more than a decade ago, then all of these things become piecemeal efforts. We should be ensuring that the efforts of municipal governments, provincial governments, and the success of what we have seen in Quebec is something that we can strengthen and build on if the federal government was at the table.

Therefore, I am very hopeful that the bill that is being debated today for a national housing strategy for the development of such cooperation and partnership is something that can be and will be supported by members of the House.

I believe that when we talk to people in our communities, we see the dire circumstances that people are facing. I sometimes feel sick when I see people come to my constituency office and they have been on a waiting list for more than 10 years to get into social housing. It just seems so wrong for something so basic. When somebody puts their name on a list and they wait and they wait, they still do not manage to get into the limited housing that is there.

It is an issue of demand completely outstripping the capacity that we have. Therefore, it is very important that we develop this plan so that we can move on and begin to use the resources that we have to put such a plan into effect.

I want to thank the organizations that have been supporting the bill. I know that there will be more support coming in because it has gained a lot of interest across the country. This is something that housing organizations, like the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada, the National Aboriginal Housing Association and others, have worked on year after year. They have never let it go.

There was a time when housing was not even on the national agenda. It is now. We are making this a political priority. We are saying front and centre that Canada's record on housing is now abysmal. It is something that is an embarrassment in the international community as evidenced by the report from the United Nations.

I look forward to hearing from my colleagues in other parties about the bill today. We look forward to support of the bill, so that we can work on it in committee. I certainly want to say to our colleagues in the Bloc that we are committed to presenting an amendment that we think will make the bill acceptable in terms of the jurisdiction of Quebec, as we did with our child care bill and our bill on post-secondary education.

I want to see the bill go forward. There is more debate to be had. We want to see this plan go forward and I hope the members will support it.

Private Members' Business

• (1715)

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I certainly thank the member for her passionate speech. She raises a number of interesting points. Some of them I disagree with and I rise here today in the House to indicate that we will not be supporting Bill C-304, a bill that would legislate the establishment of a national housing strategy.

The NDP sponsor of this bill tells us that it is meant to improve the access of Canadians to safe affordable housing. In fact, this bill would only serve to severely restrict the ability of the government to adapt and continue to meet the housing needs of Canadians. It would do this by hampering our ability to adapt our programs and initiatives in response to changes in the economy, to shifts in local needs, and housing market conditions into the changing realities of today's families.

The housing needs of 80% of Canadians are in fact met through the marketplace. For those who need some assistance, our government already has a comprehensive multifaceted approach in place which covers the entire spectrum of the housing continuum to provide Canadians from all walks of life and in all parts of the country with access to safe and affordable housing. This support ranges from promoting the success of the Canadian housing industry, to helping families buy a home, working with provinces to create affordable rental housing, and helping some of our most vulnerable citizens find a safe place to call home.

Unlike this bill, our government's approach also recognizes the constitutional jurisdiction of the provinces and territories in the area of assisted housing, as well as the need to work with a variety of different partners in order to deliver results. This really is about partnership, collaboration, and working together at various levels of government and with various partners.

It is not the job of government to mandate rigid national solutions to local problems that are under provincial jurisdiction and the member herself alludes to that fact. I am sure the Bloc will have some interesting things to say about that.

In fact, I would point out to the members of this House that the bill, as presently worded, neglects to mention the territories at all. This sort of oversight can be nothing less than a lack of respect for our provinces and territories and the constitutional jurisdiction that they hold on these matters.

Our government's commitment to housing has been part of our government's promise to Canadians for a long time. In total, our government is already investing more on affordable and supportive housing than any other government in Canadian history. For concrete examples, we need to look no further than Canada's economic action plan.

In creating this economic action plan we undertook an unprecedented level of consultation. We listened to Canadians from coast to coast to coast to make sure that the very best ideas were brought forward. Now we are working with our partners in all levels of government, and in the private and community sectors to turn these ideas into action.

Step one in this plan is to create jobs and to create them now. Because of the economic downturn, many people in the construction industry are out of work. Building and renovating homes is a powerful way to get the economy moving again because it puts those people to work quickly and because most of the materials and supplies that are involved in home construction are made right here in Canada. This has an even more economic impact.

Through Canada's economic action plan we will make up to \$2 billion available over two years in repayable low-cost loans to towns and cities for housing related infrastructure projects. These loans will make it easier for municipalities to break ground with shovel ready projects that can create new jobs quickly, while also building better roads and developing more efficient and reliable water and sewage treatment systems.

Even while we grow our economy, we cannot forget that housing is about more than financial stability. Having a place to call home has a direct and tangible impact on the health and welfare of Canadian families and their communities. That is why the economic action plan is also investing in the well-being of some of our most vulnerable citizens, including low-income Canadians, seniors, persons with disability, aboriginal Canadians, and for people like Karen from Queensville, Ontario.

Karen lives with a mental illness. As a result, she has led an isolated life which often left her feeling alone and without hope. The Valley View Rest Home changed all of that. Valley View provides accommodation and support for people who are seeking treatment for mental health or addiction issues. More importantly, it offers its residents a sense of family, a feeling of belonging, and a rediscovery of hope.

• (1720)

After a devastating fire in April 2004, Valley View was almost forced to close its doors. However, thanks to a grant from CMHC's residential rehabilitation assistance program, Valley View reopened its doors in January 2007. It has been helping Karen and many others like her ever since.

Like Karen, there are about 1.5 million Canadian households that are unable to afford safe, adequate housing on their own. In September 2008, this government committed \$1.9 billion over the next five years to help the homeless and improve and build new affordable housing for low-income Canadians.

Canada's economic action plan builds on this commitment with a further \$2 billion over two years to build and renovate existing social housing.

In total, the government currently provides \$1.7 billion each year through CMHC for social housing assistance to some 630,000 low- and moderate-income Canadian households. This is a crucial part of our national social safety net. However, much of this housing is in need of major repairs and renovations.

Private Members' Business

The economic action plan will provide \$1 billion to renovate or improve older social housing. This investment will help improve the quality of life for residents of these communities while also ensuring that their homes will be available and affordable for future generations. At the same time, it will put more construction workers and tradespeople back to work and put more money into the hands of Canadian suppliers and manufacturers.

For low-income seniors and people with disabilities, we will be investing \$475 million in new social housing to ensure that they can continue to live independently in their own homes and communities for as long as possible.

Our government also recognizes the significant need for affordable and sound housing in many first nations communities and in the three territories. That is why we are investing \$600 million to build new social housing in first nations communities and in Canada's far north and to repair and modernize existing housing.

In this regard, our government was pleased to hear all three northern housing ministers say they were thrilled with the northern housing investments contained in our economic action plan.

Here is what the Nunavut housing minister had to say in this regard:

I think we all agree this is good news for housing all across the North. It's an investment in our communities, an investment in our economies.

Really, it depicts how partnership and partnering can work when it needs to work.

Overall, Canada's economic action plan provides \$7.8 billion to build quality housing, stimulate construction, encourage home ownership and enhance the energy efficiency of Canadian homes. This just builds on the many other housing programs and investments that are already in place.

Of course, when it comes to housing, the challenge is too great for any one entity to handle alone. We all have a role to play, from the federal government to the provincial and territorial governments, municipal governments, non-profit groups, community associations and the private sector. All have an important part to play in the housing continuum.

In Canada, for instance, assisted housing is first and foremost a provincial and territorial jurisdiction. Provinces and territories support a range of social policy and program interventions. This includes the shelter component of social assistance, operating and support subsidies for special-purpose housing, subsidy programs for home ownership, and the delivery and cost sharing of federally funded programs.

Bill C-304 does not recognize this jurisdiction, nor does it recognize the differences in local need that require local solutions. Indeed, Bill C-304 would provide the federal minister with a *carte blanche* provision to implement a national housing strategy in any way the minister sees fits, regardless of the views of our provincial and territorial partners.

Consider, for example, how the provinces and territories would react to subclause 4(2) of this bill, which would give the federal minister the power to "take any measures that the Minister considers appropriate" to implement the proposed legislation.

From a constitutional point of view, this approach runs directly counter to provincial and territorial jurisdiction. From a practical perspective, it also works against the clear and compelling need for a flexible approach to housing that recognizes local needs and solutions.

Our government is committed to doing everything it can to work with all our partners across the country to ensure that Canada's housing system remains world-class.

• (1725)

Mr. Andrew Kania (Brampton West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to speak to this issue. I clearly support this bill going to committee.

I would like to review the preamble of this bill and its objectives. It specifically states that this bill is to ensure secure, adequate, accessible and affordable housing for Canadians. Frankly, I am shocked to hear that the Conservatives would not support that and would vote against this bill. I cannot understand that as a Canadian.

How can anybody argue against at least studying the establishment of a national housing strategy? That is all that would occur if the bill went to committee. Canadians need to know that the Conservatives do not even wish to study the establishment of a national housing strategy. That is unbelievable.

It has been proposed in clause 5 that there be a conference between the federal government and provinces within 180 days. How could anybody vote against that? Why would we not try to come up with some ideas?

There is a major problem with this bill: It should be a government bill. That is the problem. The government should be concerned about social housing and alleviating poverty in Canada. It should not be up to a private member to put this forward. I find that shameful.

I have a letter from Peel Poverty Action Group, dated March 18, 2009, which talks about:

the need for affordable housing in Peel Region, which has the largest waiting list (13,500 families) and the longest wait (more than 10 years) of any municipality in Canada;

On behalf of the 13,500 families in the region of Peel that are waiting for affordable housing, I say shame on the Conservatives for not even wanting to study the possibility of a national housing strategy. They will not even let it go to committee to consider it. How is that reasonable? Canadians need to know that they are opposed to even thinking about helping people who need housing in Canada.

Poverty and housing are related. Obviously if people were not living in poverty they would not need affordable housing. So the first question is, how do we fix that?

Private Members' Business

Before I get to that, I would like Canadians to know that not only do the Conservatives currently oppose studying this issue and trying to fix it, but they made it worse. Canadians need to know about all their cuts.

In budget 2006, the Conservative government cut \$200 million of the \$1.6 billion the Liberals had committed to affordable housing. Imagine how much better Canadians would be now if that had not happened.

On September 25, 2006, the Conservative government cut \$45 million in the administration of CMHC programs.

On May 8, 2006, the Conservative government cut \$770 million from one of Canada's most popular, efficient and effective programs designed to fight global warming, the EnerGuide program.

I know it is unbelievable, but there is more.

The Conservatives later reversed their decision to cut EnerGuide in February 2007 but did not restore the \$550 million to help low-income households.

There is more. In December 2006, the Conservative government announced that it would also cancel the SCPI program. After all that, Conservatives pretend that they are actually trying to help. Yet they will not even study this issue in committee if they have their way.

If Liberals had been elected last fall, things would already be better. The Liberal government had committed to the alleviation of poverty. It had a 30-50 plan, a well thought-out plan, to alleviate poverty by reducing by 30% all Canadians living below the poverty line and by 50% all children. People would be better off. There would not be the same need for affordable housing going into the future if Liberals had been elected.

There were additional tax measures such as the guaranteed family supplement to help 500,000 needy Canadians, giving them each \$1,225 more per family per year. We are not seeing the Conservatives help people in that measure.

In addition, income supports would have increased in areas such as public transit, child care and social housing. This is right from the Liberal platform.

• (1730)

If the Liberal Party had been elected, this is exactly what would have happened. We care. A Liberal government would tackle the housing crisis by helping to provide for 30,000 new social housing units and refurbishing another 30,000 existing units to make them more livable.

As part of this commitment we would also expand subsidies for dedicated units for low-income Canadians in federally funded cooperative housing. The Liberal Party would have renewed the residential rehabilitation program and the homelessness partnering initiative. A Liberal government would help low-income families with their energy bills. This would have the double benefit of alleviating poverty and helping the environment.

With the platform that we ran on, if we had won the election, suffering would already be in the process of being alleviated and

when we win the next election, that is what will take place. We will work toward helping the people who need it.

In the interim, I am proud to state that I will be supporting this private member's bill. It should go to committee. I do not understand how any responsible Canadian, regardless of political affiliation, would not wish at least to study the issue, to bring in anti-poverty groups and other experts to hear what they have say, and make some form of meaningful recommendations to the House for the benefit of Canadian society. I find it shocking that the Conservatives will not even let us consider making people's lives better.

On behalf of the people in the region of Peel, on behalf of all Canadians living below the poverty line, I am proud to state that I will be supporting the further study of this issue in committee. I challenge all colleagues in the House to put aside their political affiliations and recognize that this is a serious problem for all Canadians and that the issue should at least be studied in committee.

• (1735)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to rise in the House today.

I am also happy to hear my colleague in the Liberal Party say he will support the bill and is concerned about social housing. That is not really what we remember of the Liberal government, especially under Paul Martin, when it made deep cuts to the transfer payments for social housing. This seems to confirm what people always say about the Liberal Party: it is more progressive in the opposition than in power. If it ever does get back into power, the Bloc Québécois will make sure it forms a minority government and there are as many Bloc members on hand as possible to ensure that its alleged concerns about social housing actually result in some concrete action.

What we are talking about here is safe, affordable housing. I started talking spontaneously about social housing, although that is not the only issue here. It is a major concern, though, of the Bloc Québécois and there is a lot of it in my riding. Jeanne-Le Ber is a riding in southwest Montreal that is crossed by the Lachine canal, and which, as hon. members may recall, was Canada's industrial birthplace. It was here in my riding that industrial Canada was born.

There are still many people in my riding who are part of what is called the working class. They have very modest incomes, and all too often, they even live in poverty. In some cases, their families have been living for generations in such working-class areas as Saint-Henri or Pointe-Saint-Charles. They are therefore very rooted in the community.

Private Members' Business

There are some new people as well, including me. They come to live here and are more affluent. Often they are professionals or retired baby boomers who want to move closer to the centre of Montreal after having raised their children in the suburbs. They buy splendid condos with views over the Lachine canal or convert apartments, duplexes or triplexes into single-family homes. It is fantastic. It is a great place. This influx causes a problem, though, because it results in a clash or confrontation, even though I do not like the word. There are two conflicting uses for the land. Every time a triplex, for example, is converted into a single-family dwelling, two apartments disappear where people of more modest means could have lived.

We have to find a way to reconcile these uses because I think that kind of diversity is good. It is good to have neighbourhoods that include people of all social classes, people with higher incomes and those of more modest means. That is a social ideal I can envision, and I think it is much better than a society with poor neighbourhoods, ghettos in one part of town and rich neighbourhoods with big fancy houses in another.

However, we have to understand that the people who have been living there for generations, people who have relatively low incomes, are finding it harder and more expensive to keep living in southwestern Montreal because newcomers to the area, those who have moved to Verdun, are improving their properties, which causes rent to go up and makes it nearly impossible to find affordable housing.

• (1740)

What should we do to encourage diversity in these neighbourhoods? We have to find a way to create a more balanced market. Demand is high, and that kind of pressure increases rental rates, so we have to intervene to create downward pressure that will result in a more balanced market.

There are ways to do that. One way is to build social housing, affordable housing and housing co-ops. People in my riding are working very hard to make that happen, and they need government support. The question is, which government should be providing that support?

The Bloc Québécois believes that this issue falls under the Government of Quebec's jurisdiction. These are social programs that provide direct assistance to individuals. We believe, as does the Government of Quebec—unanimously, I might add—that it should have full control over the implementation of social housing, community housing and affordable housing policies in Quebec.

However, we also believe that the federal government should contribute financially. Among other things, we believe that 1% of the budget for federal government programs—some \$2 billion per year—should be transferred to Quebec and the provinces so that they can implement their own housing policies.

Furthermore, in the last session we introduced a bill that proposed using the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation surpluses, which are funded in part by revenues generated through premiums paid by wealthier citizens when they purchase homes. Thus, it would be a meaningful gesture to distribute this wealth and use these billions of dollars sitting idle at the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation to provide affordable housing to those most in need.

Having said that, I am pleased to see that, at least on this matter, the NDP has broached the issue of respect for Quebec's jurisdictions. The clause giving Quebec the right to opt out of any national program with full compensation—that goes without saying—is necessary in order for us to support the bill. We will support it and send it to committee. Needless to say, if it returns to this chamber without that clause, we will no longer be able to support it.

We are hopeful that this clause will be introduced and debated in committee. We are talking about the right to opt out with full compensation. It goes without saying that if Quebec is not given compensation and is simply told to take it or leave it, this will not work. The Government of Quebec already invests in affordable housing programs and it must continue to be the one and only authority in this matter.

In this regard, I would like to read an excerpt found on page 21 of a study on the cost of federalism for Quebec in the housing sector prepared by the Société d'habitation du Québec in September 1995.

Federal housing measures represent interference in a provincial jurisdiction. The federal government has imposed very rigid rules for housing measures. It has also made its financial participation contingent upon a multitude of administrative rules as well as pan-Canadian objectives and criteria, making it difficult to plan interventions in a Quebec context. The presence of the federal government in this sector of activity has resulted in much administrative duplication engendering additional costs that undermine the coherence of interventions.

This was obviously written before the deep cuts by the Liberals. Now that it is time to reinvest in affordable housing, we believe that the government must continue to respect the authority of the Government of Quebec in this matter.

• (1745)

[English]

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, now more than ever we need a national housing strategy. I want to commend my colleague from Vancouver East for presenting Bill C-304, one which I hope will have speedy passage through this House so that we can finally realign our efforts at fighting homelessness with the actual needs of Canadians.

I am very proud to second this bill. I am honoured that the member for Vancouver East would ask me to be involved, since housing and homelessness is an issue that I am very passionate about.

As the housing and homelessness critic for the New Democratic Party, I have had the opportunity to speak several times on the housing situation in Canada, in speeches, in questions to the minister, and constantly I refer to the situation in Canada as a crisis. Canada is truly in a housing crisis.

In 1998, on the 50th anniversary of the UN Declaration of Human Rights, the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee declared that housing was in a crisis situation. It made the following statement:

Private Members' Business

We call on all levels of government to declare homelessness a national disaster requiring emergency humanitarian relief. We urge that they immediately develop and implement a National Homelessness Relief and Prevention Strategy using disaster relief funds both to provide the homeless with immediate health protection and housing and to prevent further homelessness.

That was 11 years ago and the rallying cry is still echoing today. However, my question is, is anybody actually listening? Many Canadians still do not have access to adequate, secure or affordable housing.

Our international friends would be surprised to hear that we have a housing crisis in Canada, because in 1976 Canada signed on to the International Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights. This covenant guarantees everybody's right to an adequate standard of living, including food, clothing and housing. What this means is Canada has said out loud to the world that there is a right to housing in our country. Unfortunately, we have not lived up to those international obligations and Canada's once positive reputation has now been tarnished.

Right now, there are as many as 1.5 million families in Canada in precarious or unacceptable housing situations. Three hundred thousand people use our shelters every year. If asked, most Canadians would probably say we have a strong social safety net, with employment insurance, pensions, social assistance, and the like. The reality is that many of those programs do not actually meet the needs of Canadians. These programs have been continuously eroded by the actions, or inactions, of successive governments.

To give a snapshot illustration, in my community of Halifax, Community Action on Homelessness recently released a report card on homelessness for my area. One of the things it found was that the wage one would need to afford a one bedroom apartment is \$14.23 an hour. That is the wage one would need for rent, bills and groceries. The minimum wage in my province is \$8.10 an hour. It is obvious that it does not add up. A person on social assistance would need the equivalent of 144% of his or her personal allowance in order to afford even a bachelor apartment. It is just not right. Imagine how that person's situation would change if there actually were affordable housing that the person could access?

In my life before becoming a member of Parliament I worked as a community legal worker with Dalhousie Legal Aid Service. I worked a lot on the tenant rights project, where we would work with low-income individuals to try and keep them housed. We would help advocate at the residential tenancies board to try to keep them housed. It was slum housing. It was in poor repair. There was mould. There were overcrowded rooming houses. I had a client whose ceiling fell in on her. There were bedbugs. I was fighting to keep people in that housing. Imagine actually fighting to keep someone in a place where the ceiling has collapsed on her in the middle of the night.

This is why I ran federally. I wanted to be involved in creating a national housing strategy to create options for low- to middle-income Canadians to offer them just a little bit of dignity, because that is what this is about. It is about human dignity. Thankfully there are policy solutions that can be made right here in this House.

The best way to combat homelessness is, surprise, by housing people. I know, it is a bit out there.

● (1750)

I was reading recently about tent city, an area in Toronto where people were homeless and living in tents. At the culmination of the events down at tent city, a very concerted effort was made by the city to actually house a lot of these people.

A staggering number of those people who were housed, I think it is around 80%, are still housed. That shows us that it is not necessarily about these people being drug addicts or having mental health issues and that is why they are homeless, they are choosing to be homeless. The majority of the people from tent city are still housed. The answer to homelessness is to build housing. It is pretty radical.

To illustrate the point further, I will tell a brief story, again featuring an organization in Nova Scotia. Many people are familiar with the Elizabeth Fry Society. It works across Canada with women involved in the criminal justice system and it does great work. In Halifax, it found that regardless of how much advocacy it does, regardless of how much support it gives to women in need, the results were just not what it needed. It was really clear, as I am sure it is to most of us here, that we cannot help women whose lives are touched by crime, addiction or the associated risks of poverty if they do not have a safe place to stay and a roof over their heads.

The people in this group actually shifted direction slightly and decided to try to fill that need themselves. They opened up housing for women. It is called Holly House and it is located in Dartmouth, on the other side of the harbour to my riding. Having worked with this organization, I can say that creating affordable housing options has saved lives and it has increased the prosperity and well-being of the clients they serve and of my community.

Holly House gets it but so far the government does not. Perhaps, after hearing these very passionate interventions in this honourable House, maybe it will introduce its own bill for a national housing strategy. We can always hope.

I will acknowledge that there was some money in the budget for affordable housing, which is great, and I will not really criticize what was there. However, sadly, the money that was in the budget was specifically designed to be a one time only measure.

This might be fine if homelessness were a one time only problem. Maybe it is a two year phase that people suddenly find themselves in, but the crisis is real in this country, in our cities, in our rural communities and it is tragically higher among first nations.

To tackle a problem that is this large, we need bold and comprehensive plans. There needs to be coordination between the federal government and its responsibility for the well-being of Canadians, the provinces and their responsibility over housing in general, and the municipalities, first nations governments and friendship centres that provide the front line services in our communities.

Private Members' Business

The bill we are debating today seeks to re-align the government's approach to dealing with this issue by mandating a national strategy for a national problem. It takes our current patchwork of programs and it strengthens them, setting national standards and calling for investment in not for profit housing, housing for the homeless, housing for those with different needs and sustainable and environmentally constructed homes. It is about rights and it is about dignity.

For those who are not swayed by a human rights argument, let me put it in a little bit of a different way. Let me put it in economic terms. Operating emergency shelters in this country costs more than it would to simply build affordable housing, the foundation from which our most vulnerable people can build a meaningful life.

Earlier today I spoke with Sheri Lecker who is the executive director of Adsum for Women & Children. Adsum offers quite a few programs for women and children, including an emergency shelter and second stage housing, as well as long term housing for women.

Sherry explained to me that the per diem she receives from the province for a single person, a woman or a child, to stay at the shelter is \$86.80 per day. Let us contrast that to Adsum Court, which is long term housing for women that Adsum provides. It has 24 units and it is supportive housing. It is housing where people are there to support the women who are in this housing. The rent being charged is anywhere between \$125 and \$535 a month. It does not make a profit but it does come out even. I share this example to illustrate how simple it is. It is remarkably easy to solve this problem. We just need leadership at the federal level to do it.

In closing, with this bill we have an opportunity to make a real difference by implementing a plan to tackle this crisis. I would ask that all members of the House join me in support of the bill sponsored by the member for Vancouver East and join in this national project for a just and more prosperous Canada.

• (1755)

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to add my voice against Bill C-304, the bill that seeks to create a national housing strategy. In fact, the only thing this bill would do is handcuff the efforts of this and future governments to continue to respond to the housing needs of Canadians in a timely, flexible and proactive manner.

What else would it do? It would run roughshod over provincial jurisdiction in this regard, empowering federal governments to make housing decisions that are rightly to be made by the provinces and territories.

The NDP would have this House believe that Canada does not have what they call a "national housing strategy". The truth, though inconvenient for the NDP, is much different. The reality is that our government already has a multi-pronged, comprehensive and well-funded approach in place which provides housing for Canadians from all walks of life and across the country.

As a result, Canada's national housing system allows the housing needs of 80% of Canadians to be met through the private market. This approach recognizes and respects the constitutional responsibilities of the provincial and territorial jurisdictions in the area of assisted housing. More important, our approach actually includes

both the provinces and territories, unlike the NDP's bill which fails to even mention the territories at all. Our approach recognizes the need to work with a variety of partners, to support vulnerable Canadians, homeowners, renters and the housing sector.

Our national housing agency, the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, has been working with these partners to help Canadians access safe, affordable housing for more than 60 years. In total, this government is already investing more on affordable and supportive housing than any other government in Canadian history.

Even more important, those investments are achieving real results, making a real difference in the lives of Canadians across this country. For example, for those Canadians who need help to find housing they can afford, our government provides \$1.7 billion each year through CMHC in support of some 630,000 low and moderate income households. This includes ongoing financial support for many non-profit and cooperative housing projects.

In September 2008, our government committed more than \$1.9 billion over five years to improve and build new affordable housing and to help the homeless. Canada's economic action plan builds on this commitment with an additional \$2 billion over the next two years to build new social housing and to repair or retrofit existing social housing.

Under the affordable housing initiative, more than \$900 million of a total of \$1 billion federal funds have now been committed or announced, every dollar of which has been matched by the provinces and territories. This funding will help an estimated 41,000 Canadian families to have access to a safe, affordable place to call home.

Through Indian and Northern Affairs Canada and CMHC, we are also helping first nations build the capacity to manage their own housing programs. In our 2007 budget, we announced the creation of a \$300 million first nations market housing fund, which opened its doors in May 2008. This fund will help provide new homes for up to 25,000 first nations families living on reserve over the next 10 years.

Those are only some of the steps taken by this government on housing and only a part of our national approach.

When it comes to housing matters, the provinces and territories expect federal governments to respect their jurisdictional responsibilities. In this regard, our government will continue to work with the provinces, the territories, the private sector, first nations groups and community and non-profit partners to facilitate access to housing and to lend a helping hand to those whose needs cannot be met by the marketplace.

• (1800)

These kinds of collaborative programs are essential because in Canada assisted housing is fundamentally part of the jurisdiction of the provinces and territories. Bill C-304 does not recognize or respect this jurisdiction.

That is why I cannot support the legislation and urge all members to oppose it as well. To put it in perspective, we have debated this bill for 55 minutes and we have already faced two amendments, so there are many flaws in this to begin with.

Allow me to continue to tell the House about other measures within this government's national approach to address the housing needs of Canadians.

Each year CMHC's many renovation programs help low income households, landlords, persons with disabilities and aboriginal people bring their homes up to minimum health and safety standards. These programs enable seniors and persons with disabilities to live independently in their own homes and communities, close to friends and family. Other CMHC programs provide funding for emergency shelters for women and children who are trying to escape domestic violence and a start to a new life free from fear.

CMHC also helps those Canadians who are looking to buy a home where they can put down roots and raise their families. Through its mortgage loan insurance, CMHC has lowered the cost of getting a mortgage and helped one-third of all Canadian families with the purchase of their home, regardless of what part of the country they live in.

In 2007, for example, 37% of CMHC's mortgage loan insurance business helped Canadians who lived in areas that were underserved by private insurers. CMHC also facilitates financing for affordable housing projects by allowing borrowers to have access to loans at the best possible rate. Its securitization program helped to lower the overall cost of borrowing. CMHC remains the only mortgage insurer in Canada of large rental housing buildings, nursing and retirement homes and first nation housing on reserve.

I know my time is coming to a close. I would like to conclude by saying that, as I mentioned before, we are 55 minutes into this debate and already we have uncovered several flaws in this legislation as well as several amendments that would need to be made before we even get going.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

• (1805)

[Translation]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in tonight's adjournment proceedings. A few weeks ago, I asked the Minister of State (Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency) a question, but it was the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food who answered. I

hope the minister responsible for the ACOA will answer my questions tonight.

The question I asked was relatively simple and clear. I asked why the ACOA had not yet paid the \$6 million it announced in December 2007 to assist Atlantic Beef Products of Borden-Carleton, Prince Edward Island. The federal government announced this \$6 million in funding with great pomp and fanfare in December 2007. One might wonder if it was not just before an election campaign, but that was the announcement, in any case. Officials from three Maritime provinces, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, were also there.

Under the terms of the agreement, each of these provinces was to contribute \$2 million. The federal government was to invest \$6 million in order to save jobs. I should explain that this slaughterhouse is the only one in the Maritimes, and it is important to all the beef producers in these three provinces. The provinces contributed their \$2 million shares, to be paid into a trust fund to be managed. The federal government was supposed to do the same thing.

However, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food answered:

Mr. Speaker, there is absolutely no delay. There was a process put in place. ACOA is forwarding the money to the provinces as they require it. I am not sure what the member opposite is talking about.

The question was simple, so the response should have been as well. The provinces made their contribution, so why has the federal government not yet paid its share? That was in 2007, and it is now 2009. What the federal government is doing is unacceptable.

Even worse, two of these three maritime provinces had to provide an extra \$140,000 each in temporary financing to make up for the money that the federal government and ACOA had not yet paid to the firm that was managing the money. We need to create jobs, especially during an economic crisis when we cannot afford to lose even one more job. More than 70 people work full-time for this company, but this beef slaughterhouse creates nearly 400 jobs in all. That means that 400 jobs could be lost in Prince Edward Island, which manages the only slaughterhouse in the Maritimes.

This is more irresponsibility on the part of the federal government. It says it wants to help people work. If it wants to help people work, then why has it not deposited the \$6 million in the trust account where the maritime provinces have put their money in order to secure the future of this slaughterhouse, which is so important to beef producers?

I hope the Minister of State for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency will answer me this evening.

[English]

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of State (Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank my colleague from New Brunswick on the opposite side of the House. It is a pleasure to be here this evening to address this question. I know we have little time in question period to do it and I hope to expand on the answer this evening, so that there is a better understanding.

Adjournment Proceedings

The \$6 million loan has been approved and the funds have been ready for some weeks. The Atlantic Beef Products plant was seeking support and received it from this government. The Government of Canada is committed to helping Canadians in all regions of Canada. Since taking office our government has stepped up to the plate and we have provided the leadership Canadians want and deserve.

We have taken action through my department, the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, to encourage growth and foster economic success. This includes a one time investment of \$6 million from our government to Atlantic Beef Products.

The hon. member will be interested to know that the provisions for the repayment of the loan allow for the gradual development of the value added products that the plant must produce. With matching provincial contributions, that means a total investment of \$12 million. This investment is being loaned to help make Atlantic Beef Products the only federally inspected beef processing facility in the Maritimes become more efficient and competitive, and encourage the development of new products and markets.

Because our government in partnership with the three maritime provinces took action, the only federally inspected beef plant was able to remain open. Because our government listened to Canadians, we were able to save 350 direct and indirect jobs in Atlantic Canada, jobs that are keeping Atlantic Canadians home, spending their hard earned money in local stores, buying local products, supporting local businesses, and generating economic activity that benefits the entire Atlantic economy.

Our government understands the importance of helping communities, small and large, urban and rural, to help them prosper and keep local industries competitive. That is why on December 9, 2007, my colleague, the member for Central Nova, announced the \$6 million federal investment. This investment reaffirms our government's confidence in the maritime beef industry. It is a sign that this government is standing up for Canadians and for Canada's traditional businesses.

Our national government is all about action. Since taking office, our government has announced more than \$761 million in over 1,000 projects across Atlantic Canada. Our government continues to support ACOA, so it can help further strengthen Atlantic Canada's economic advantage.

Our government is getting things done in Atlantic Canada. The results speak for themselves. They clearly show that this government is successfully tackling the economic development issues that are facing the Atlantic region.

• (1810)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Mr. Speaker, clearly, the answer is certainly not satisfactory. They are still talking about December 2007 when it is now April 2009. Those are two different years and the money is still not there. It has not been paid and it cannot be seen. Why have they dragged their feet so long?

The other thing is that it was an investment. How is it that suddenly that investment in that company gets turned into a loan? An investment is a contribution to ensure survival. We are not talking here about a repayable loan; they were talking investment.

One wonders whether, when all is said and done, when ACOA made the announcement—when his predecessor made the announcement—perhaps the expectation was that one or more of the three maritime provinces would not manage to make its contribution and then they could just let the agreement slide. But that was not the case.

When are we going to see this situation settled and when will the money be put on the table so that the producers can have a guarantee that this slaughterhouse, the only one in the Maritimes, will continue to operate?

[*English*]

Hon. Keith Ashfield: Mr. Speaker, the arrangement with Atlantic Beef Products was always a provisional loan, one tied to the production of value added products. There are certain terms and conditions that had to be met in that process. Those have been met. It took some time to do that. Those were conditions that were also worked out with the three provinces with which we work very well and closely on a continuous basis.

The three provinces were aware of the arrangement. We understood the arrangement very well. The terms and conditions were met. The money was flowed several weeks ago. The fact that Atlantic Beef Products has not taken advantage of that is up to the company. It is a business decision when the agreement was signed.

[*Translation*]

FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise here in the House again this evening because I would really like to understand why, after more than three years of this Conservative government, Canadians have seen the loss of over 20,000 jobs in the forestry sector. Small communities in Quebec, Atlantic Canada, Ontario and British Columbia have been hit the hardest.

At present, even the giants of the forestry industry, such as AbitibiBowater, are suffering from this government's mismanagement.

On March 10, 2009, the House passed a motion to help the forestry sector in Quebec and elsewhere. As we all know, the Conservatives opposed the motion.

This government continues to talk about measures introduced in its 2009 budget, measures that would provide \$170 million over two years. Unfortunately, that money only serves to extend programs that are obsolete and ill-suited to the needs of the forestry sector in this crisis period.

The forestry industry does not expect the government to come up with a magical solution. It merely wants a responsible government that will save jobs today and create jobs for tomorrow. The forestry sector also wants the government to ensure that any aid that is provided is shared equally among the regions, does not create more debt and protects this already vulnerable industry.

Forestry industry representatives are not asking for a bailout. What they want is help to break into new, lucrative markets in China and India, and funding to support research and development on new products.

Adjournment Proceedings

• (1815)

[English]

Liberals believe in delivering a real plan for Canada's forestry sector. We believe in a national plan that serves all communities and workers equally. The government currently has no plan and no vision for this struggling sector.

In 2005 a Liberal government announced a real plan for the forestry sector that addressed the issues at the heart of what the forestry sector is looking for: loans, support for research, new technologies, skills development, and community adjustment. The Conservative government cancelled that plan upon forming government in 2006.

[Translation]

Three years later, the Conservatives still have no plan. The government's inaction, its inability to come up with a complete plan for the struggling forestry sector, is forcing the provinces to go it alone, with no promise whatsoever of help from Ottawa. Worse still, this government is now accusing the opposition of not having proposed either an action plan or any ideas. We had a plan, we had a project, and the present government, for political and ideological reasons, cancelled those initiatives and left the forestry sector in danger.

The Conservatives' lack of perspective has led to the crisis, which has deprived a very large number of Canadians of employment. The Conservatives continue to defend their failed softwood lumber agreement. The Conservative government had stated that this agreement would put an end to disputes and yet Canada is once more before the courts.

[English]

What will it take to make the government see that the forestry sector is in crisis? Jobs are being lost, businesses are closing, and communities are suffering.

[Translation]

We no longer need to ask that question, "If a tree falls in the forest does anybody hear?", because there are no more trees falling. Plants are closing, and a flourishing industry rooted deep in our history and our identity is in peril.

The forestry sector is an integral component of our history. We need go no further than the foyer of this place and look up. The ceiling is decorated in each corner with motifs representing mining, agriculture, fishing and forestry. Many governments prior to this one deemed it necessary to underscore the importance of the forestry sector. But this one no longer believes in it and will do nothing to maintain and strengthen this essential part of our heritage.

Does the entire industry have to collapse before this government reacts? The time for action is now. We need leadership urgently. It is time to take action.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the absence of my colleague, the Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), allow me to answer the question raised by the member for Brossard—La Prairie.

The member is wrong to say that we refuse to intervene in the forestry sector. This statement is surprising, especially since we are pleased to have settled the softwood lumber dispute with the United States, and even more so because that agreement received the overwhelming support of the forestry industry. The agreement has brought stability to the forestry industry, the communities and workers throughout Canada, and has returned \$5 billion to Canadian softwood lumber producers, of which \$1 billion has gone to Quebec.

No matter, I would like to remind my colleague that, as a responsible government, it is our duty and our obligation to intervene when regions and communities are in trouble. Naturally, we are extremely worried about the current state of the forestry industry and the position of its workers, whether in Matagami or Val d'Or in Quebec, Bathurst or Miramichi in New Brunswick, or anywhere else in our country.

Forestry workers in Canada and Quebec are the victims of a series of events that have hit the industry hard. The main problem is the market. There are fewer and fewer buyers. Let us bear in mind that, for the industry to recover, we need our neighbours to the south to increase their demand.

Contrary to what the member for Brossard—La Prairie would have us believe, our government is taking action to minimize the effects of the crisis on the forestry industry and its workers. We have also brought in a number of measures to support key economic sectors, which will help these workers and their communities.

Our recently released economic action plan provides strategic support for the forestry industry. Our plan supports the development of new products and processes so that the industry can take advantage of as-yet-unexplored international opportunities.

I would also like to point out that our recent economic action plan, which the opposition helped us pass, gave Export Development Canada (EDC) more money and more ways to help businesses during this increasingly difficult economic period. EDC is working with 90% of Canada's forestry companies and expects that number to go up in 2009.

We have announced several initiatives to stimulate the forestry industry, such as the tax credit for home renovations, which will give Canadian families a tax break of up to \$1,350; \$2 billion to accelerate construction of college and university buildings; \$500 million to support construction of new community recreation facilities and modernization of existing facilities, and more.

Our government is also very concerned about what is happening to Canadian workers, and that is why we developed our action plan. We want a brighter future for Canada, our workers and forestry.

• (1820)

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Mr. Speaker, I would just like to remind my colleague that the softwood lumber agreement has not yet resolved anything. The matter is still before the courts. Quebec and Ontario are now subject to a productivity surtax.

I should also point out that what the industry wants now is help with innovation and exporting, but they are not getting that kind of help.

Adjournment Proceedings

That is what I am asking the government. When will it follow through on the promises it made in Canada's economic plan?

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Mr. Speaker, our government has created the \$1 billion community adjustment fund, and more than \$200 million of that money will go to Quebec and will be managed by Canada Economic Development.

I would like to remind the member for Brossard—La Prairie that we are continuing to work with all industry sectors. Our government is continuing to consult with all economic players to ensure that we come out of this crisis stronger and more competitive than ever.

I would also like to point out to the member that we are not the only forestry stakeholders. The provincial governments also have a major stake in the issues affecting the forestry industry. As a government and a stakeholder in economic development, we are providing our SMEs and our communities with tools and resources to strengthen, renew and stimulate their economy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. The House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:24 p.m.)

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