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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, November 18, 2009

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, November 18, 2009

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

● (1400)

[English]

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

[Members sang the national anthem]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

AURORA BARBARIANS RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB

Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on October 31, the Aurora Barbarians men's rugby team took their second Ontario Rugby Union championship in three years, beating the Oakville Crusaders 12 to 11 at Fletcher's Fields in Markham, Ontario. In addition, the men's club claimed their fourth straight Marshall Premiership League title.

It is clear that the Aurora Barbarians Rugby Football Club has become the centre of rugby excellence in Ontario and perhaps in Canada. The Barbarians organization also continues to field strong women's junior and senior teams and boasts the strongest junior men's program in the country.

The Aurora Barbarians organization is active in my community, offering youth from 10 years old the opportunity to get involved in sport and offering them opportunities to excel at the highest levels as they mature. It also provides them with a medium to meet and interact with players across the country and around the world.

I ask that my colleagues join me in congratulating the Aurora Barbarians organization on a job well done.

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PEGGY'S COVE POST OFFICE

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Peggy's Cove is a top tourist destination, world-renowned for its spectacular beauty. I am told that it was the only place where one could get a cancellation stamp from a lighthouse. However, Canada Post closed the Peggy's Cove post office and took the stamp with it.

Why did the government let Canada Post shut down a unique part of our maritime history? Will the minister ensure that this decision is reviewed immediately and insist that Canada Post find a way to restore the Peggy's Cove post office?

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[Translation]

CENTRE ALPHA DES BASQUES LITERACY CENTRE

Mr. Claude Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to highlight the 25th anniversary of the Centre d'alphabétisation des Basques in Trois-Pistoles, commonly known as Centre Alpha.

Over the years, this organization has excelled in fulfilling its mandate to organize and offer basic learning activities, and to transmit general knowledge to people who are illiterate or have little education.

Centre Alpha helps many individuals develop their academic, personal and social skills, and does a great job of promoting public awareness of the problem of illiteracy.

I would like to congratulate the founding members, whose idea for this project has become a wonderful support for the community. I would also like to thank its many dedicated and motivated volunteers for their hard work.

I wish Centre Alpha another 25 years of success.

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● (1405)

[English]

CHELSEA DONELON

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honour a truly inspirational young woman from my riding of Edmonton—Strathcona. Two years ago, at the age of 15, Chelsea Donelon, an aspiring Olympic skier, survived a catastrophic car crash that killed her mother and two grandparents and left Chelsea a paraplegic. This would have left most of us defeated, but Chelsea has a remarkable spirit.

Statements by Members

Inspired by Chelsea, her schoolmates and teachers pulled together to raise over \$26,000 to refit her home. Chelsea has remained on the honour roll at her school. Showing immense courage and determination, Chelsea has now joined the championship Strathcona High School swim team, competing against able-bodied athletes. Her dedicated swim coach, volunteer Kirby Feng, has vowed that, if she wishes, he will help her get to the Olympics.

Chelsea Donelon is a role model for all young Canadian women. I ask the House today to salute this wonderful young woman and wish her every happiness and success in her many pursuits.

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GIBSONS, BRITISH COLUMBIA

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to congratulate the town of Gibsons for earning the coveted award as the world's most liveable town with a population under 20,000. The United Nations-backed International Awards for Liveable Communities presented the award last month in the Czech Republic.

With a population of 4,200, Gibsons is on the magnificent Sunshine Coast of the riding I represent. Gibsons won the award for best practices and leadership in creating a socially and environmentally sound community. A 40-minute ferry ride from West Vancouver, this world-leading town includes the quaint fishing village of Gibsons Landing, past home to *The Beachcombers* TV show, and the commercial industrial hub of Upper Gibsons on Highway 101, which connects Gibsons to Sechelt and the rest of the beautiful Sunshine Coast.

Last month's award recognizes Gibsons' ambitious development that conserves energy, water and land. Congratulations to the town of Gibsons for winning acknowledgement of the splendour about which its residents and visitors already knew.

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[*Translation*]

DRUG AWARENESS WEEK

Mrs. Lise Zarak (LaSalle—Émard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week is Drug Awareness Week in Quebec. The theme is "Where are you at?"

As in previous years, government authorities in Quebec have distributed educational materials to schools and CEGEPs to raise drug and alcohol awareness among our young people and to teach them about the risks and consequences associated with substance abuse. Making information available to people is the best way to prevent addiction.

The Conservative government's drug strategy will not have an impact on addiction, nor will it protect public health. Coercive tactics and cuts to prevention programs are not effective ways to fight addiction.

During Drug Awareness Week, the Conservative government should focus on getting better results by implementing concrete measures to fight drug addiction and substance abuse in Canada.

[*English*]

HALTON REGION HEALTH CARE WORKERS

Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commend the health care professionals, including nurses and support personnel, of Halton Region who serve my riding of Oakville as well as the ridings of Burlington and Halton.

On October 28 they opened the first of five H1N1 vaccination clinics to priority patients, and after the first day they maintained reasonable wait times of 15 to 45 minutes. Seventy-three thousand patients were vaccinated in the first 10 days. That was a great success under challenging circumstances.

Halton physicians are now administering 25,000 doses of the vaccine to students and senior citizens.

The Government of Canada ensured timely delivery of the vaccine to our community, and Halton Region staff ensured that our citizens were vaccinated against H1N1 in an orderly, efficient and safe manner.

On behalf of my constituents, I thank them and congratulate them.

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[*Translation*]

MYLÈNE BRODEUR

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to draw the attention of the House to the outstanding results achieved by a figure skater from my riding, Mylène Brodeur, from Stanbridge Station.

The ISU Grand Prix includes six figure skating competitions that Mylène and her skating partner, John Mattatall, participate in. At the Rostelecom Cup, which was held in Moscow from October 22 to 25, where they were Canada's only competitors in the pairs category, Mylène and John placed sixth with a total of 141.59 points.

Then, in early November, at the NHK Trophy in Tokyo, the pair placed fifth with a score of 150.71, which allows them to move on to the Grand Prix finals to be held in December in Tokyo.

On behalf of my Bloc Québécois colleagues, I would like to commend Mylène Brodeur and her partner, John Mattatall, on their perseverance. I wish them the best of luck in the finals.

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●(1410)

[*English*]

CANADA-INDIA RELATIONS

Ms. Dona Cadman (Surrey North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is on his way home from a very successful three-day visit to India.

Despite the long-term damage created by the Liberals to Canada's relationship with India, our government is working hard to expand Canada's economic presence in India.

Yesterday the Minister of International Trade and India's Minister of Commerce and Industry signed a memorandum of understanding toward an economic partnership agreement. Once in place, this economic partnership will help expand trade, encourage economic growth and create jobs in both Canada and India.

Our government has also advanced negotiations on an international treaty and a nuclear cooperation agreement.

This economic partnership with India is just another example to Canadians that they can count on this Conservative government and the Prime Minister to encourage economic growth and open doors for Canadian businesses.

* * *

BORIS CIKOVIC

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I recently attended a candlelight vigil for Boris Cikovic who was gunned down in a local park by teen thugs trying to rob him.

The murder of Boris forever shattered the lives of his parents Vesna and Davorin and his many friends.

Soon after I was first elected, this lighthearted teen came into my office pointing out that "Borys" was misspelled on the office sign.

What is especially tragic is that the Cikovics were refugees from the horrific war in Bosnia. They escaped to the presumed safety of Canada to start a new life far from the guns and bullets of Sarajevo.

Their Canadian dream was shattered a year ago when Boris took a bullet into his very heart.

The accused killer refuses to cooperate with police and identify three others who were with him, and he is out on bail. The Cikovics struggle with the unbearable knowledge that they are possibly passing the cowardly perpetrators of this murder on the streets in their very own neighbourhood.

As legislators, let us work to ensure that the streets of our cities are free from guns and bullets.

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NATIONAL DAY OF REMEMBRANCE FOR ROAD CRASH VICTIMS

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today marks the National Day of Remembrance for Road Crash Victims, an occasion for Canadians to remember friends or family who have lost their lives or who have been injured on our roads.

Our government is working hard to improve road safety for the protection of all Canadians. We passed strict street-racing laws, introduced legislation to crack down on drug-impaired driving, and proposed tougher standards for child car seats.

Our government, along with all provinces and territories, also adopted road safety vision 2010, a national road safety initiative with

Statements by Members

the goal of reducing fatalities by 30% by 2010, and we are seeing positive results. The number of fatal collisions in 2008 was at its lowest level in almost 60 years.

Nobody can turn back the clock, but we can work together to help continue the downward trend in road crash fatalities.

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AIR PASSENGERS' BILL OF RIGHTS

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Ken Young of Oshawa, Ontario, booked a flight with a Canadian carrier for his wife, Claudia, to attend the upcoming university graduation of their son, Chris, in England on December 17, 2009. Everything was confirmed and organized, with a connecting flight, until the carrier cancelled and rescheduled the flight for three hours later. The result was that the customer would miss the non-refundable connecting flight and would miss the graduation altogether.

Now the customer will only receive 50% back on his ticket and will lose the entire connector flight from London to Plymouth, England. This is no way to treat paying passengers. When Mr. Young contacted the Canadian carrier, he was told the airline could change anything it wanted to, whenever it wanted to, with absolutely no accountability to the customer.

The air passengers' bill of rights would have forced the airline to offer the Youngs full reimbursement of the ticket price.

It is unfair for airlines to gouge and take advantage of Canadians. I urge my colleagues in the House of Commons to support Canada's first—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière.

* * *

● (1415)

[Translation]

INDIA

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today, the Prime Minister began his return trip to Canada after a very productive three-day visit to India.

Despite the long-term damage the Liberals did to Canada's relations with India, our government is working very hard to increase Canada's economic presence there.

Yesterday, the Minister of International Trade and India's Minister of Commerce and Industry signed a memorandum of understanding with a view to a comprehensive economic partnership agreement.

This economic partnership will help expand trade, open doors for Canadian and Quebec exporters, encourage economic growth and create jobs both in Canada and in India.

This partnership will deliver commercial benefits across many sectors of the economy of Canada and Quebec, including forest products, nickel, aircraft, electrical machinery, fish and seafood products and agricultural products.

Oral Questions

This comprehensive economic partnership with India is yet more proof that Canadians can count on our government to promote economic growth and create opportunities for Canadian businesses.

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HÉLÈNE PEDNEAULT

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on Sunday, Hélène Pedneault was honoured posthumously as “patriot of the year” by the Saint Jean Baptiste society. Although she has been gone for a year now, this compassionate and articulate woman of great intellect still lives on in our memory. Until the end, Hélène Pedneault's trademark indignation continued to drive her to take up causes and fight for what was right.

She was an activist of conviction and a convincing activist who waded into many a battle. She fought for equality between men and women. She co-founded the Eau Secours organization to ensure that water remains public property and accessible to everyone. She worked tirelessly within the Bloc Québécois in Joliette and on the Conseil de la souveraineté in order to help Quebec become its own country with its own voice on the world stage.

Her literary accomplishments and her work as a journalist show that the written and spoken word can become tremendous tools for social and political change. We will remember Hélène Pedneault as a friend, an activist, a humanist and, most of all, as a patriot.

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[English]

COURAGE CANADA

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on a day when we recognize the tremendous contribution of the CNIB, I rise to extend our congratulations to Courage Canada founder, Mark DeMontis.

Raised to never give up, Mark has achieved a great deal in the five years since he was diagnosed with Leber's optic neuropathy. Able to see nothing directly in front of him and only making out shadows and outlines in his periphery, he has never driven a car again or read a book, but he has still found a way to skate.

He joined one of six teams in Canada with blind players, while pursuing his education at the University of Western Ontario. Noticing that blind hockey was only available to a small group of adults, he decided to found Courage Canada to raise awareness of blind hockey.

After gruelling and difficult training, he began a journey across Canada and completed 5,000 kilometres on in-line skates. It took him three months to cross five provinces, and with the help of Lions Clubs and volunteers, he raised \$60,000 to support his not-for-profit organization, Courage Canada.

I invite the House to join me in congratulating Mark DeMontis, a great Canadian.

LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal leader shows just how disconnected he is from the priorities of Canadians with each passing day.

While we are focused on the economy and helping Canadians, he continues his pursuit of forcing an unnecessary and unwanted election that will harm our economic recovery.

Yesterday his party stood alone in the House in voting against Canada's economic recovery, for an early election again.

The Liberals voted against the popular and recession-fighting home renovation tax credit, assistance for first-time home buyers and Canadian businesses, tax benefits for low-income workers and help for farmers in drought and flood regions.

It is the same old game with the Liberal leader, which highlights a key difference between our government and his party.

Canadians want us to fight the recession; the Liberals want to fight the recovery. Canadians want us to govern; the Liberals want an unnecessary election.

It is yet further proof that the Liberal Party members are not in it for Canadians. They are in it for themselves.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the question I have is for the Minister of State of Foreign Affairs for the Americas.

When Richard Colvin, who is a foreign service officer of great distinction, went to Kandahar in April of 2006, he said that he found the condition of Afghan detainees, and I quote from his affidavit, to be “serious, imminent and alarming”, as a result of which he wrote what he described as an “action memorandum” to his department, as well as to other departments.

I would like to ask the minister, given the fact it was an action memorandum, why did it take the government 18 months—

• (1420)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of National Defence.

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in fact, two and a half years ago, we did action this particular file. We received concerns about conditions in Afghan prisons. As a result, we instituted a more robust system of visitation. We instituted investments to improve those conditions. We instituted a more rigorous process of assisting Afghans with respect to human rights.

We inherited an inadequate transfer arrangement that had been left in place by the previous government. We improved upon that two and a half years ago. We continue to work both with local officials and members in all departments to improve things.

Oral Questions

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Colvin went on in his affidavit to say, “I also obtained firsthand reports of torture and personally saw evidence of injuries related to torture suffered by detainees”.

No matter how much the Minister of National Defence might huff and puff, the simple fact of the matter is that there was an 18-month period, not a month, not 6 weeks, not 8 weeks, but 18 months in which the government had information and did nothing and performed no action whatsoever.

How can he explain 18 months of inaction dealing with something as serious as firsthand evidence of torture from a Canadian public official?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think we all know here in the House who is doing the huffing and puffing and hyperventilating and pontificating. It is the member opposite.

What I have already said and will repeat is that we acted upon recommendations that were coming from officials within the department from numerous sources. We improved upon regular visitations to see that conditions were in fact improving. We invested in the prison system and infrastructure itself. We improved upon the transfer arrangement.

We continue to make those investments. We are there to help the Afghan people do more for themselves and improve the human rights in Afghanistan.

[Translation]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): But the question remains, Mr. Speaker. The fact is that the Government of Canada took 18 months to change the conditions and respond to Mr. Colvin's affidavit, which is very clear on the subject of torture.

Can the minister explain—this is a very simple question—why it took 18 months, a year and a half, for the Government of Canada to respond to the recommendations made by its own employee, Mr. Colvin?

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, we actioned this file where the previous government had failed. In fact, it was not—

Hon. Ralph Goodale: You're late.

Hon. Bob Rae: Eighteen months.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Speaker, if the bobble-heads and the Muppets would just let me answer the question, the reality is that the previous government did not even have a transfer arrangement in place until one month before it left office. We improved upon the transfer arrangement, invested significantly in the prison system, in training officials, in having regular and rigorous visits. That is an improvement upon the record of—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Vancouver South.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is being reported that in 2007, Canadian diplomats were ordered to hold back information in their reports to Ottawa about the torture of Afghan detainees in the hands of Afghan authorities, and that the

public servants were threatened with sanctions if they did not comply with that order.

Who in the government issued that order? Why is the government creating an un-Canadian culture of secrecy and cover-up about an issue as abhorrent as torture?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas), CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is an outrageous question.

The previous government did not have any detainee policy. Since our government's 2007 strengthened agreement on the transfer of detainees, the Department of Foreign Affairs has received no complaints regarding the treatment of transferred prisoners.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is abundant evidence that many in government knew about allegations of torture, dating back to May 2006. There is clear evidence that the government ordered diplomats not to put information in writing about the torture. There is evidence that public servants were threatened if they did not comply with this order. There is also evidence that the government has not been telling the truth about all of this to Canadians. It is time the government levelled with Canadians and told us the truth.

● (1425)

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the allegations are simply not true. There is no evidence.

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[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Chinese and American presidents have publicly stated that they want to make the Copenhagen summit a success. They have said that they want to reach an agreement on climate change that would have an immediate impact. That is leadership.

The Canadian government cannot be said to be showing leadership when it is constantly coming up with ridiculous excuses for not tabling its plan to fight climate change.

In light of the statement by the American and Chinese presidents, will the government stop trying to sabotage the Copenhagen summit at all costs?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is very clear: the Copenhagen summit will be a success. There will be international commitments when the major emitting countries agree to sign on.

One thing is certain: we have always been clear, in addition to committing to bold targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 2020 and 2050. We are also waiting because we want to work with the Obama administration on a North American approach.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the reason the government is constantly putting off introducing a regulatory framework with absolute greenhouse gas reduction targets is that it would have an economic impact on the oil companies.

Oral Questions

Will the government admit that it is acting solely in the interests of the oil companies, at the expense of the environment and the economy of Quebec?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it would be a mistake to introduce a plan that sabotages the economy in general, and we do not want to make that mistake. It is possible to balance environmental protection and economic prosperity. Mr. Obama and the Prime Minister have both said that they want an international commitment that includes the major emitters.

In addition, we will have a North American approach and work with the Obama administration. But one thing is certain: we will not sign an agreement like the Kyoto protocol that we can never comply with. That is irresponsible and it is not leadership.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, now that the American and Chinese presidents are getting behind Copenhagen and calling for a complete agreement with immediate effects, Canada no longer has a choice and must present tangible and credible proposals to fight global warming.

Does the government intend to use the Bloc Québécois plan, which proposes an absolute target of a 25% reduction in greenhouse gases below 1990 for industrialized countries by 2020?

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the answer to the member's question is, no. Our targets are the toughest in Canadian history; that is, a 20% reduction by 2020.

What he is asking us to do is support something that does not exist.

Canada is hard at work with our international partners, striving to come up with a new international agreement on climate change. That member needs to support our government.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, while Quebec is increasing its efforts to meet the Kyoto objectives, the federal government is doing the opposite. The federal approach will be the one heard in Copenhagen because Quebec will not be able to speak directly.

Will the Conservative government comply with Quebec's request to speak with its own voice and defend its own vision in Copenhagen?

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member is misleading this House. This government's plan is clear. We now have in effect a North American target of 20% by 2020. We are also making progress on tailpipe emissions standards, aviation standards, carbon capture storage, and a North American integrated cap and trade.

We are getting it done. Why will that member not support good environmental legislation?

NUCLEAR ENERGY

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, India's nuclear facilities are on high alert and the region is quite volatile, as we all know.

Yet, the Conservative government is about to sell India nuclear materials and technology. The last time that Canada did this, India took the opportunity to build the bomb. India is still refusing to sign the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. For that reason, Australia is refusing to sell nuclear technology to India. The party of Lester B. Pearson should note this before supporting the initiative.

What guarantees does the government have that Australia does not seem to have?

• (1430)

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, those of us in the government believe that India is a responsible democracy and shares with Canada the fundamental values of freedom, democracy, human rights, and respect for law.

India has made substantial non-proliferation and disarmament commitments to achieve the trust of the nuclear suppliers group. As the Prime Minister said earlier this week:

We have great faith in our Indian friends and partners. We are not living in the 1970s. We are living in 2009.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, 2009 remains a very dangerous period of time.

[*Translation*]

Choosing nuclear energy sources poses many problems and exporting nuclear technology is not a good idea. The potential for environmental damage is huge. The issue of nuclear waste disposal has not been resolved, for example, and then there are the very great risks to people's safety.

Has the Canadian government abandoned such Canadian principles as sustainable development and nuclear non-proliferation just to make a buck? Is that the low point we have reached?

[*English*]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know that India has a like-minded liberal democracy. It is a like-minded country that respects democracy and human rights, shares our values and our commitments with respect to the environment.

One of the very important benefits of nuclear energy is that it produces electricity in a non-emitting form, something that is much better than dirty coal which is proliferating greatly in that part of the world.

We are committed to working with our friends in India. We are committed to working with the responsible, respected international government in India. We are committed to getting the job done for the environment.

*Oral Questions***THE ENVIRONMENT**

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it certainly is not sustainable, and sustainability should be at the heart of all of our policies whether it is job creation or exports.

Talking of sustainability, the Conservatives' position prior to the Copenhagen summit on climate change is anything but. In June the environment minister said that he would have a plan before the summit. He now says that the Conservatives will wait until the rest of the world has taken action before we take action. They want to be the last to act rather than the first.

Canadians want them to be the first. They owe a responsibility to the next generation. Where is the leadership on climate change?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have seen great leadership from the Prime Minister and President Obama. For the first time ever we have two of the largest emitters in North America working together.

We believe in that common North American approach, working constructively with President Obama, reaching out to all large emitters, whether it be India, China or the European Union, to get everyone on board to clean up what has become a big mess with respect to global warming.

We need to have real and meaningful action. We need to have all the big players on board. Canada is committed to doing our part to make a deal happen in Copenhagen.

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HEALTH

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for weeks the Minister of Health incorrectly told Canadians that they could all be vaccinated by Christmas. Now the minister has to admit, and Dr. Butler-Jones has confirmed, that at least seven million Canadians will be left behind until well into next year.

Why did the minister mislead the House? More seriously, why did she fail to tell Canadians the truth?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 20% of the population of Canada has been vaccinated this week.

At the same time, our schedule is well ahead in producing vaccines for all Canadians. This week alone we have 10.4 million vaccines available to all Canadians. The provinces and territories are working hard to vaccinate every Canadian who wants to receive a vaccine by the end of the year.

This is a good news story for Canada. We are leading in the response to this pandemic. We are well ahead of schedule. It is something to be proud of.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, headlines across the country are clear, "Not enough vaccine for all until Christmas". According to Dr. Butler-Jones, there will not be enough vaccines for all Canadians by the end of 2009. The government broke its promise. Our front line medical workers need more help from the government if they are going to vaccinate as many Canadians as possible.

Will the minister now commit the additional resources to get this done?

• (1435)

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I also want to acknowledge again the hard work of the front line people who are working very hard in the provinces and territories to vaccinate every Canadian who wants to receive the vaccine by the end of this year. Canada is ahead of schedule. We produce more vaccines for Canadians, 10.4 million vaccines by the end of this week, and 20% of our population has been vaccinated to date.

Once again, I will say this in the House, some jurisdictions will have completed their vaccination program this week and that is something to be proud of as Canadians. We should be proud of how we are doing.

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[Translation]

COMMUNITY ADJUSTMENT FUND

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is still using the fund for partisan purposes. What it did in Quebec was shameless and totally inappropriate.

The community adjustment fund has a budget of \$1 billion over two years. It targets regions that have lost a lot of jobs, regions that are in need. Let me repeat that: the money is supposed to help regions in need, not help Conservative members get themselves elected. Let us look at the numbers. The Conservatives hold 15% of the seats in Quebec, and their ridings received 54% of the funding. That is 54%.

Does the government realize that this violates all of the rules of ethics, fairness and impartiality?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to remind the member of the facts.

The facts are these: thanks to the community adjustment fund, our government, together with the Government of Quebec, has made over \$230 million available to the silviculture and forest resources management sectors in all regions of Quebec.

We will continue to do our job. The member recently came to my riding and said that I was not doing my job. Now he says that I am doing it too well.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is a load of bull. What happened was that 15% of the ridings received 54% of the funding just because they voted for the Conservative Party. Clearly, the Conservatives believe there are two kinds of ridings: good ones, which voted for them; and bad ones, which voted for other parties. They believe there are good voters and bad ones. In other words, they are sending the message that they will help people who voted for them and ignore everyone else.

Do we have two classes of citizens now? Is the government telling workers and the unemployed, families and children who do not live in a Conservative riding that they deserve nothing?

Oral Questions

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has been my pleasure to make a number of announcements, just as several of my colleagues have done across Quebec.

The community adjustment fund serves all regions of Quebec. Canada Economic Development's mandate is to help regions that are struggling economically, and we intend to do our job.

I would like to thank the 400 public servants working in 14 business offices across the regions of Quebec. These people analyze all of the applications we receive. Unfortunately, we cannot help regions that do not ask for financial support. We will continue to do our job. As long as people ask for our help, we will take action.

* * *

NUCLEAR ENERGY

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, regarding the potential sale of Candu reactors to India, the Minister of State of Foreign Affairs for the Americas tried to reassure us by saying that India has agreed to respect a “voluntary moratorium” on nuclear testing. It does not take much to satisfy the minister, when we know that India misused Canadian civilian nuclear technologies to produce its first nuclear bomb in 1974, even though the parties had signed an agreement.

Does the Minister of State realize that Canada is being negligent by not requiring that India sign the nuclear non-proliferation treaty before Canada sells India any Candu reactors?

[English]

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas), CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada's support for a nuclear cooperation agreement is a turning point in our bilateral relationship that we should celebrate. We are rebuilding a relationship that was badly damaged under the previous Liberal government which petulantly imposed ineffective sanctions.

India has indeed made substantial non-proliferation and disarmament commitments to achieve the trust of all of the nuclear suppliers group and which were reiterated on September 5. As the Prime Minister said, “We have great faith in our Indian friends and partners”.

[Translation]

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this government is definitely in the pay of the nuclear industry. Since it is hard to find buyers for Candu reactors, the Conservative government is ready to try anything. It is turning a blind eye to the 1974 betrayal, and says it is satisfied with India's political declaration, which is hardly binding, to ease its conscience.

When will this government take responsibility by imposing conditions on India: no Candu reactors unless it signs the nuclear non-proliferation treaty?

● (1440)

[English]

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas), CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is 2009 and not 1974. I can assure the House that both sides are committed to moving as quickly

as possible so Canada can fully participate in the important Indian market.

* * *

[Translation]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Jean Dorion (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Israel has authorized the construction of 900 new homes in East Jerusalem, even though its annexation has never been recognized by Canada and the international community. The United States, Great Britain and the European Union have vigorously condemned the action.

Will Canada add its voice to that of the international community and condemn this illegal decision?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague.

[English]

I can assure him that Canada's position has not changed. Canada considers settlement expansion unhelpful to efforts to restart peace negotiations. At the same time, Canada urges both parties to refrain from any unilateral actions that undermine the resumption of direct bilateral negotiations.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean Dorion (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, according to George Mitchell, the U.S. special envoy to the Middle East, this project threatens the chances of negotiations with Palestinian authorities resuming.

Why is it that Israel's closest ally can denounce this situation while Canada dithers?

[English]

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas), CPC): Mr. Speaker, one might quibble in terms of the proximity of Israel's closest ally but, as I said, our long-standing position has not changed. We do consider settlement expansion to be unhelpful to the peace process.

* * *

[Translation]

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Senator Housakos' financing methods are so suspicious that the leader of the ADQ has asked the police to investigate.

The Conservatives refuse to disclose what they learned about the senator from government checks prior to his appointment to the Senate.

Why is the government hiding the results of its inquiry?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is another fishing expedition from the member for Hull—Aylmer.

Oral Questions

I will tell the House what the government has done with respect to political financing. When we took office, we made the biggest priority an overhaul of our public laws with respect to political financing. We banned all corporations from donating to political parties. We promised it and we did it. We banned all unions from contributing to political parties. We promised it and we delivered it.

We finally put an end to \$5,000 a person cocktail parties and lowered the limit to \$1,000.

Those are the most pro middle-class initiatives ever taken in Canadian history. We have cleaned up the ethical mess we found when the hon. member's party left government.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, would the hidden inquiry first reveal a shady arrangement of cross-funding between the ADQ and the Conservatives, along with a system of partisan federal appointments in exchange for payments, as was the case with Nick Katalifos and Jean-Martin Masse, for example?

How can anyone fail to see the connection between this cross-funding arrangement and the Conservatives' system of partisan appointments?

[*English*]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is increasingly becoming the leader of the Liberal rat pack.

The Liberals seem to have only two objectives in relation to this matter. One is character assassination and the other is a mean-spirited personal mudslinging, which does not serve the member opposite or his party well in my judgment.

* * *

TORONTO PORT AUTHORITY

Mrs. Bonnie Crombie (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government has claimed many times that it takes the allegations surrounding the Minister of Natural Resources' sorry tenure of the Toronto Port Authority seriously. However, its definition of serious seems to condone violations of ethic codes, breaking rules against conflicts of interest and using taxpayer money to advertise Conservative fundraisers.

How can Canadians take the government seriously when it refuses to discipline its ethically challenged minister?

• (1445)

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again we have a member of the Liberals' rat pack seeking to malign a hard-working minister in this government.

Let me say that the Minister of Natural Resources has brought more integrity to her office than many ministers whoever sat in cabinet from that party opposite.

Mrs. Bonnie Crombie (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is willing to take the Toronto Port Authority at its word when it suits its interests. Signing off on unauthorized expenses is not a problem. Hospitality policies violated but we need not worry because the board says that it is fine.

However, when the Port Authority asks for an audit by the Auditor General to shed light on the truth, the government covers up.

What do the Conservatives have to hide? Why are they afraid of what the Auditor General will find?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Toronto Port Authority operates on an arm's-length basis. We look to its directors and to its audit committee. We look to ensure that all of its statements are audited each and every year, which has always happened.

The Toronto Port Authority also undergoes, as do all similar port authorities and crown corporations, a special examination every five years, and that will be happening this year.

* * *

FINANCE

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today, the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Health announced the site of the February meeting of the G7 finance ministers and the central bank governors.

Could the Minister of Health please tell the House the significance of today's announcement?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce that the meeting of the G7 finance ministers and central bank governors will be hosted in Iqaluit, Nunavut.

At such an important and challenging time, I can think of no better location for an international meeting focused on collaboration to resolve shared challenges.

Throughout its long history, the people of Nunavut and all of Canada's north have demonstrated a community spirit and steadfast determination to overcome adversity.

[*Member spoke in Inuktitut*]

* * *

BROADCASTING INDUSTRY

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are fed up with the ridiculous media war between the broadcasters and the cable giants.

On the one hand, the cable giants have racked up \$2.1 billion in profits while jacking up cable rates year after year and, on the other hand, the broadcasters are crying destitution after blowing \$740 million on U.S. programs.

Meanwhile, Canadian consumers are getting gouged, local television is being held hostage and Canada's amazingly versatile film and television industry is being hung out to dry.

What steps will the minister take to put an end to this corporate circus?

Oral Questions

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question and obviously all Canadians have been paying attention to this important debate. What we have done are two things most recently that are very important.

First, we gave a section 15 requirement to the CRTC that the most important thing it needs to do in its consideration and deliberation over this very important issue is to put consumers first. We want to ensure that consumers are put first in this conversation and discussion.

The second thing we have done is to bring together all the stakeholders, which is what the member is talking about. We have brought together all the partners and we have reached an agreement on part II fees which gives \$450 million in immediate relief to the industry. This is good for all Canadians.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if the CRTC were doing its job, the minister would not be floating trial balloons about using an order in council to override the CRTC.

When he does override, will it be to help his buddies in the cable industry or will he force the cable giants to put some money into local television, stop consumers from being gouged and ensure that the broadcasters meet minimal requirements so that Canadian stories are once again heard on Canada's prime time airwaves?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are making the investments that the member describes in terms of Canadian content.

Not only did we arrive at the agreement to bring all partners together with regard to part II fees, we also brought partners together to create the Canada media fund; \$310 million to do what the member describes, which is to create Canadian content and make it available on multiple platforms so Canadian stories can be told to Canadians on Canadian platforms. That is what we have done as a government.

The member criticizes us for getting involved. I will not apologize to the member or anyone else for getting involved to ensure that the CRTC does not arbitrate between two big corporate entities as he describes but ensure that the first responsibility of all of us, including the CRTC, is to put consumers first.

* * *

• (1450)

[Translation]

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in 2007, the Privy Council Office, the Prime Minister's own department, ordered Canadian diplomats to cover up information held by the government concerning the torture of Afghan detainees transferred by Canada to the Afghan authorities.

Can the government explain to the House whether this extremely serious information, coming from the Departments of National Defence and Foreign Affairs, is founded?

[English]

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will say it again and I hope the opposition listens very carefully.

DFAIT has received no allegations of torture or abuse. The Government of Canada has received no proven allegation of abuse since instituting our strengthened detainee arrangement in 2007.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in this matter, this minister, the Minister of National Defence and the Minister of Foreign Affairs are doing whatever it takes to bury the truth. We are going to do whatever we can to uncover the truth.

Senior officials from the Privy Council Office gave Canadian diplomats orders to hide the facts and the truth about the torture used against Afghan detainees. Where do these revelations come from? From officials at National Defence and Foreign Affairs.

Will the Minister of National Defence stand up here and tell us—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of National Defence.

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): No, Mr. Speaker. These allegations come from an unnamed source.

The reality is that we have co-operated. We have provided thousands of documents to a number of tribunals, both military and parliamentary. We have provided access to witnesses. We have co-operated with respect to disclosure, which we will do today with respect to parliamentary hearings.

I do want to be very clear on one thing. There has never been a proven allegation of abuse involving a Taliban prisoner transferred by Canadian Forces. There is no wrong-doing on the part of the soldiers who are working hard to protect our interests in Afghanistan.

* * *

POVERTY

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the government could not tell us why it erected an expensive sign in Gatineau to advertise the installation of another sign. In Yellowknife, another Conservative sign has been bought to advertise the installation of “interior-exterior signs”. Signs, signs, everywhere a sign. Meanwhile, almost 800,000 Canadians are lining up at food banks. Statistics Canada confirms that the jobless numbers are continuing.

Instead of paying for signs to advertise signs, why will the government not send a sign to Canadian families who are struggling in this Conservative recession. That would be real stimulus. Why can the government not help those in need?

Oral Questions

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as part of the government's economic action plan, we have undertaken the largest infrastructure initiative in this country since the second world war.

We believe we have an important responsibility to be both transparent and accountable for the investments that we are making.

Signs are going up right across the country, which are signs of hope, signs that opportunities are coming to the labour market and signs that the economic downturn is turning around and the economy is growing, jobs are being created and Canada will soon be back.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for every dollar invested in food banks, eight dollars' worth of essential food can be acquired by food banks to help people living in poverty. The \$100 million spent on Conservative propaganda could have meant \$800 million for Canadians who are struggling to feed their families. Instead, we get signs, some of which are advertising other signs.

The Conservative government has chosen to spend \$100 million of publicly funded money for Conservative waste instead of helping the victims of this Conservative recession.

What kind of pathetic sign is that to Canadian families in need?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that in every corner of this country some of our fellow citizens are experiencing a real challenging time with respect to the economy. That is why we are brought forth Canada's economic action plan. That is why we are working constructively with the provinces, territories and municipalities on getting infrastructure projects up so we can create jobs and create a bit of hope for the future and opportunities for Canadian workers.

Whether it is for the materials, for architects, for engineers or for the construction workers themselves, we are putting in more money and giving a big boost to the Canadian economy. We are proud of that.

We have an important responsibility to continue to work hard on creating those important jobs.

* * *

• (1455)

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today we learned that the Privy Council Office sent a directive to Afghanistan that information on the handling of Afghan prisoners should be withheld from reports by diplomats in the military. This not only undermines accountability and transparency, hiding the truth from Canadians, but it allows ministers to have what is known as plausible deniability.

Why did the Conservative government send this directive and why did it think that information on torture and abuse had to be covered up?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas), CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me say again that this government has always had concerns about the treatment of Afghan

prisoners. Because the government believes in upholding its obligations under international law, we put in place an enhanced system in 2007 in order to visit and monitor transferred Afghan prisoners.

Let us not forget that the previous government put in place a transfer agreement only one month before it left office.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, how convenient is it for the most powerful agency in the government to order that no records be kept? This appears to be part of a broader strategy by the government to hold back details of torture and abuse in Afghan prisons.

In 2007 the Department of National Defence even set up a group called the Tiger Team to vet access to information requests concerning detainees. The process continues with government efforts to hinder the work of the Military Police Complaints Commission.

When will the government remove this cone of silence and let Canadians learn the truth?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as has been stated many times, we have co-operated with the Military Police Complaints Commission. We have co-operated with parliamentary committees. We have co-operated with investigations.

I state again that there has never been a single solitary proven allegation of abuse of a Taliban prisoner transferred by the Canadian Forces. It is important the member knows that since this new arrangement has been put in place, there have been over 170 visits to Afghan prisons to ensure this new arrangement is improving human rights.

That is what our government did. We improved upon the situation. We will continue to make improvements in that country.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Ms. Candice Hoepfner (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-23, the Canada-Colombia free trade act, has been filibustered in the House for over 30 hours. The NDP and the Bloc, with the support of the Liberals, are wasting Parliament's valuable time, holding up an agreement that would create new business opportunities for Canadians, create jobs and encourage economic growth across Canada and in Colombia.

Could the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade tell the House why the Liberal Party should finally stand up and support this free trade act?

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the reality is the opposition parties are allowing their partisan ideology to fritter away the opportunity of Canadian companies. If they would just listen over there—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Oral Questions

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. parliamentary secretary has the floor. We have to have some order in the House.

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Mr. Speaker, the reality is the opposition parties are allowing their partisan ideology to fritter away an opportunity for Canadian companies to have access to Colombian trade in front and ahead of their competition.

The reality is we need the Liberal Party to support the Colombia free trade agreement. We need it to support Canadian companies. It is time the Liberals did it. Get up and support—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte.

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AIRLINE INDUSTRY

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, putting consumers first is an interesting slogan.

The House may recall when the Minister of Transport voted in favour of my motion to bring in new, robust, legally binding protection for airline passengers. However, what members will not recall is that prior to the vote, that same minister, the industry's regulator, ordered professional lobbyists to mount a public relations campaign to undermine the very policy of which he voted in favour.

Which is it? Is it the lobbyists who are running the transport department, or is the transport department running the lobbyists? This collusion occurring between the government regulator and the airline companies must end. When is airline passenger protection coming in?

• (1500)

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are obviously tremendously concerned for the many Canadian families, people with small businesses and the travelling public. They face challenges with weather conditions. Then there are mechanical issues and other problems with our airlines.

However, we have been working constructively. We have put forward some new public policy. We have worked constructively with the airlines. We are pleased with some of the new proposals that have come forward.

Right now before the House, there is legislation, sponsored by the NDP, which I confess I voted against, that is being considered in committee. The committee will hear from the public, the industry and consumer groups. We look forward to hearing that input.

* * *

[*Translation*]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, after spending years contaminating the water in Shannon, now the federal government is continuing to go after the victims by seeking a review of the 2007 ruling by a Quebec court that authorized a class action. Yesterday, Quebec's environment minister deplored the federal government's general attitude toward this matter and said she is infuriated at what has happened. She also criticized the federal government for withholding information.

How can the minister responsible for the Quebec City region continue to keep mum while the Department of National Defence continues to show such bad faith?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us be very clear. We have great sympathy and concerns for anyone affected by the situation involving the water in Shannon, which is why we have invested significantly, in fact, \$40 million initially to improve the water system and another \$13.3 million to complete the construction of the existing water system to help the people of Shannon. That initiative was taken by my colleague from Quebec.

The issue with respect to the court is an issue over the review of disclosed material. It is the government's view that this case has no longer qualified as a class action suit and we are moving to have it dismissed. However, with respect to the people of Quebec, the people of Shannon, we will continue to work to find solutions.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a large road sign in my riding describes the federal and provincial governments partnership with the title "Canada's Economic Action Plan".

According to the federal government, infrastructure projects are supposed to provide work opportunities for small and medium size B.C. businesses. A million dollars of B.C. taxpayer money has gone to a Washington State company, giving us another example of the government's continuous outsourcing of contracts and jobs, work that could have been done in B.C.

Is the Prime Minister aware of this practice and if so, is this his response to the buy American policy of the U.S. government?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are making investments in infrastructure in every corner of the country. We think it would be disastrous if we reverted to protectionism, something that would kill jobs around the world and lower the standard of living for everyone.

We have had a particularly strong partnership with the province of British Columbia, making investments in the Southern Interior, on Vancouver Island, in metro Vancouver and in the north.

We are very proud of the infrastructure investments we are making. We are so proud of these infrastructure investments, we have even put a sign up in front of each one of them, showing how transparent and accountable we are to the taxpayers in British Columbia.

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Rodney Weston (Saint John, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Prime Minister is travelling abroad, enhancing Canada's profile on the world stage and opening many doors for Canadians. Meanwhile the opposition parties are attempting to undermine Canadian fishers' interests in international waters off the east coast by rejecting a modernized and widely supported fisheries convention.

Could the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans tell the House why these political games are so off the mark?

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government has cleaned up NAFO.

The Atlantic offshore fishing industry supports the new NAFO convention. So do inshore fishers, so do union leaders and so do independent international legal experts, but the opposition parties are playing political games. The Liberals completely ignore Newfoundland and Labrador industry calls to protect its interests and then they claim a moral victory.

First it was the sealers. Now it is the fishers. It proves, once again, that the Liberal leader does not understand the Atlantic Canadian fishery.

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HOUSE OF COMMONS PROCEDURE AND PRACTICE

The Speaker: It is my great pleasure to table today, in both official languages, the second edition of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice—La procédure et les usages de la Chambre des communes*.

● (1505)

[Translation]

As many hon. members know, the first edition was released in 2000 by my predecessor, the hon. Gilbert Parent, and quickly became an indispensable tool for all those who work on Parliament Hill.

[English]

This second edition, edited by the Clerk of the House, Audrey O'Brien, and the Deputy Clerk, Marc Bosc, reflects current practices and procedures and contains 6,952 footnotes and about 1,500 pages in each English and French volume.

Members will be interested to hear that the second edition includes references and precedents to the end of the first session, 40th Parliament, which is December 2008, as well as many new and revised tables and figures, a bibliography and an expanded index.

For those hon. members who prefer their consultations done electronically, an HTML version of the text will be launched at the same time.

[Translation]

I would like to thank the more than 150 dedicated individuals who contributed to the drafting, revision, layout and publication of this book.

Points of Order

[English]

I encourage all hon. members not only to consult this work but, indeed, to read it from cover to cover. It is great bedtime reading. I assure them they will find it quite engrossing, as well as informative.

I invite all hon. members to join me in Room 216 for a reception to mark this very special occasion.

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POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during question period, as we were talking about a very important issue regarding the detainees in Afghanistan, the President of the Treasury Board made a gun-like gesture, something along this nature.

I found that to be completely inappropriate, wrong and disturbing. I would ask the minister to apologize.

Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us put on the record what happened. The member for Toronto Centre said that there were no Afghan prisoners transferred by Canadian soldiers to Afghani prior to 2006. It is a ridiculous suggestion that Canadians did not transfer. What did they do with these prisoners? They did not hold them.

Hon. Navdeep Bains: Mr. Speaker, it is very clear that the fact that the President of the Treasury Board is unwilling reflects some sort of guilt there. He made the gesture. It was wrong. He should apologize. That is the issue.

Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was surprised to see that member making those gestures of which he is now accusing the member. If you would check the blues and check the cameras, you will see that member making the gesture.

It is not appropriate for him to be attacking a member over here when he is doing that.

Hon. Vic Toews: Mr. Speaker, Canadian soldiers had these prisoners. They transferred them to the Afghani. The suggestion made by the member opposite was there was something untoward done by Canadian soldiers to Afghani prisoners. If he has any evidence in that respect, he should stand and give that evidence. The fact is Canadian soldiers do not mistreat their prisoners.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am going to mark my words carefully. The President of the Treasury Board has made a statement about my views, about what I have said and what I have ever suggested, which is completely and utterly false. He should know that and he should know better.

He has made a statement today in the House, which is completely and categorically untrue with respect to what I have ever suggested or has been suggested on this side with respect to the conduct of Canadian soldiers. It is absolutely ridiculous for the minister to have made such a statement. He has simply compounded the error, in which he got himself involved.

Points of Order

For him to point his fingers over here and suggest that anyone on this side has said anything with respect to how Canadian soldiers have treated Afghan detainees is completely and utterly false. That is not the issue before the House.

The issue before the House is the question of the conduct of the Conservative government with respect to how it has treated information received with respect to the treatment by the Afghan authorities of Afghan detainees. To make any other suggestion is completely and utterly preposterous.

● (1510)

The Speaker: It sounds like a continuation of perhaps the debate that might have arisen during question period had it been debate instead of questions and responses.

In the circumstances, the Chair saw none of the alleged gestures, and nothing that I have seen since has indicated there was something unparliamentary that occurred. Accordingly I do not think this is appropriate for further discussion at this time.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ACCESS TO INFORMATION, PRIVACY AND ETHICS

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 18 states in part, “No Member shall speak disrespectfully...nor use offensive words against either House, or against any Member thereof”.

Yesterday, on page 6864 of *Hansard*, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage said:

This morning, in the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, I had to put up with the abhorrent behaviour of a partisan chair, who pays no attention to the rules governing parliamentary committees whatsoever. However, during that meeting, I provided the respect that each member is due.

These words, I submit, are not only offensive, but they are without foundation and if I do not defend myself there may be some who will take those statements as being fact.

Mr. Speaker, accordingly, I would respectfully request that you review the transcript of the November 17 meeting of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics to determine whether or not there is a foundation for the member's statements. Should you find that they are without foundation and that certain words in fact are offensive, I would be pleased to rise on a question of privilege and to move the appropriate motion.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I actually thought referring to the member as a partisan chair would be something he would be proud of because that is how he conducts himself.

Yesterday, I brought a motion before that committee and the member did not even allow me the opportunity to introduce or speak to the motion. I thought that was abuse of my privilege as a member, but he did not much care about that because that is how he operates.

He also interjected into my allotted question time because he objected to a word that I used, a word that perhaps he is a little touchy about, a word that prompted the member for Scarborough Southwest to tweet that she thought that apparently I should lose some weight, which I also thought was inappropriate. I used the word “crime” when talking about Liberal actions related to the

sponsorship scandal. He insisted before the witness that I could not use that word. I will read directly—

The Speaker: Order. All these matters are ones that in my view should be taken up in the committee.

I would suggest that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage and the member for Mississauga South have a meeting of the committee and discuss the matter of chairing of the meetings, what things are allowed and what are not in the committee, at the committee. It is not for the Speaker or for the House to get involved in that debate. It is, respectfully, a matter for the committee. I suggest that both members raise the matter there and attempt to get a resolution in the committee. If necessary, we will hear something here, but I am not going to proceed with that now.

Mr. Paul Szabo: A question of privilege.

The Speaker: If there is a question of privilege, the member has to give notice in writing of the question and raise it an hour later. I will hear from him when I have received the notice.

● (1515)

Mr. Paul Szabo: The same one.

The Speaker: I do not have a written notice of this one.

An hon. member: Point of order.

The Speaker: If it is a different point of order. I am not going to hear more argument on the same point. I have indicated it is for the committee.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, it is different from the standpoint that this does not refer to the committee. It refers to a statement the member made in the House, this chamber, yesterday, in which he described my behaviour as being offensive. That is disrespectful—

The Speaker: It may be, but the dispute between the members here is relating to what is going on in the committee. That is what we are hearing. The matter should be resolved there. As I say, if it cannot be, the committee can do a report and we will deal with that in the House. As far as I am concerned, that is that.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons is rising on a point of order.

INFORMATION CONTAINED IN TEN PERCENTER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has come to my attention this morning that a ten percenter has been sent by our caucus into the riding of the member for Yukon that contained incorrect information about the member's voting record. This was clearly an error. It should not have happened. Therefore, I would like to apologize to the member and to his constituents.

For the record, unlike the majority of his fellow Liberal caucus members, the member for Yukon did vote against an opposition motion in April that called to maintain the long gun registry and end the amnesty, and two weeks ago he voted in favour of private member's Bill C-391 that would end the long gun registry.

To be fair, it can be confusing to determine which Liberal members support the registry and which do not. After all, it was the Liberal Party that invented the wasteful long gun registry, and it is the same Liberal Party today that is fighting to keep it in existence.

In any case, I encourage the member and those opposition colleagues from all parties who support Bill C-391 to continue to do so through the committee process.

Finally, I appreciate the opportunity to set the record straight, and once again apologize to the member.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. Russ Hiebert (South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing 34, I have the honour to present to the House reports from the Canadian branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association concerning three visits: one, a bilateral visit to Cyprus and Malta; two, the 40th conference of the British Isles; and three, the 34th Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Regional Conference in Guyana.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

ACCESS TO INFORMATION, PRIVACY AND ETHICS

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a report from the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics concerning the government response to the 11th report of the committee.

This has to do with a matter in which the committee had done a report and received a response from the Minister of Justice, which the committee was unsatisfied with and wanted to express its displeasure and disappointment with the response from the Minister of Justice to its 11th report, and to recommend to the government that it introduce into the House no later than March 30, 2010 a new access to information act that would reflect the committee's proceedings and recommendations, and furthermore, that the minister be invited to reappear before the committee before November 30, 2009.

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs.

The committee has considered Bill C-201, An Act to amend the Canadian Forces Superannuation Act and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Superannuation Act (deletion of deduction from annuity), and reports it with amendments.

• (1520)

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 24th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

Pursuant to Standing Order 91.1(2), this report contains the list of items added to the order of precedence as a result of the

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replenishment that took place on Tuesday, November 2, 2009 under private members' business, that should not be designated non-votable.

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 91.1(2) this report is deemed concurred in.

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Rodney Weston (Saint John, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the eighth report of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans in relation to the amendments to the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization convention.

[Translation]

GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND ESTIMATES

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Madam Speaker, I move that the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, presented on Wednesday, June 17, be concurred in.

I rise here today to draw the attention of the House to the danger facing small and medium-sized businesses that sell their goods and services to the federal government.

This danger was explained in the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, which was tabled in the House in June 2009.

Federal government procurement is big business in Canada. The government buys approximately \$14 billion worth of goods and services each year from thousands of suppliers. More than three-quarters of these suppliers are small and medium enterprises, or SMEs, in Canada and Quebec, and they are also the main driving force of our economy.

SMEs account for 45% of gross domestic product, which is crucial to the country's economic growth, 60% of all jobs in the economy and 75% of net employment growth. That is significant.

Thus, small and medium-sized businesses are a crucial part of the economic fabric of Quebec and Canada, and they play an extremely important role in federal government procurement, since they accounted for 65% of all procurement transactions in 2007 and 2008.

In committee, what started with a study on the bundling of information technology contracts quickly became a study on how small and medium enterprises try to access federal procurement.

We know that small and medium enterprises want to do business with the federal government for a number of reasons. We were very impressed by the desire they showed to do business with the federal government, but we were also struck by the challenges they talked about having to overcome, in order to do business with the government.

A few years ago, to help SMEs, the government implemented a system, an electronic tendering service, that posts government contract opportunities to potential bidders. This service is called MERX, and it is used by SMEs.

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Over the next few minutes, I will speak about two things: one is the bundling of information technology contracts, which led us to examine a much broader subject, my second topic; how small and medium enterprises access the federal procurement process.

Until now, small and medium enterprises received between 65% and 70% of the value of federal government contracts for professional information technology services. The total value of the contracts awarded by the federal government for this type of service was very recently estimated at more than \$600 million a year. It is SMEs that provide these services.

SMEs won the vast majority of these contracts because they were able to meet the needs of the federal government; they had the abilities and the knowledge; and their overall costs were relatively low.

• (1525)

They are flexible as well. They can adapt easily to what is asked of them and their solutions are very innovative.

The government has tried in the past to bundle several contracts and develop large IT projects. For the most part, the contracts failed to deliver on expectations, went over budget and became unmanageable. The Secure Channel project is a good example of going over budget.

When the government contracted for services in small, manageable projects, those projects succeeded 99.9% of the time.

The shortcomings of the large bundles contracts were made clear in reports from the Auditor General and the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts. The Auditor General of Canada even raised a red flag and said that we should review contracts of this kind because they did not necessarily provide much of an advantage.

Despite this red flag and the Auditor General's reluctance about bundled contracts, this government's new bright idea is to award even bigger contracts.

In our opinion, the government intends to bundle IT professional services together in order to issue four basic contracts, each valued at roughly \$1 billion annually. That is quite something. Four \$1 billion contracts annually is \$4 billion a year. Over what period? We do not know. There was talk of 20, 15 or 12 years, and then they came back to 15 years. It is up in the air. Why would they do this? It seems they want to save money.

Most services included in the large contracts the government would award are provided by small and medium enterprises. A manager of technology strategies at Treasury Board told the industry, on January 15, 2009, that he was not sure of the savings potential of these large contracts. He presumed that they would save approximately 20% but he did not provide any figures to back his claim. He planned to do some tests, but he did not know what the savings would be.

No business case has been prepared and that is very serious. It means that the contract tendering process of Public Works and Government Services Canada is being completely changed. Contracts currently awarded to small and medium enterprises are being

awarded to very large companies, without knowing exactly what the result will be. That is serious.

In other words, the government hopes to bundle information technology contracts because this will supposedly result in savings. I repeat that this is a supposition, as no business case has been prepared. The supposed savings would be achieved to the detriment of SMEs because they do not have the capacity to bid on megacontracts.

• (1530)

The Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates studied the issue at the request of a number of small and medium enterprises from various sectors. They sent us letters stating that something was happening at Public Works and Government Services Canada. That is how learned of these bundled contracts.

We must add that this will also lead to a lack of competition because these megacontracts will be awarded to one, two or three large companies. In the case of information technology, it may be Bell, Telus, or CGI. There are three or four major companies that could carry out these bundled contracts worth \$1 billion per year. The committee members are quite certain that this will increase the cost to taxpayers.

At present, when a request for proposals is issued all companies, including SMEs, can participate. They know that one significant factor is quality, of course, but so are project costs. Bids are close. Bidders compete, which reduces the cost to the taxpayer.

By excluding all small and medium enterprises from the tendering process, the government will give two or three major information technology companies the ability to dictate all prices. In the past, this type of situation has always made prices go up instead of down. It is a matter of supply and demand.

What worries us most now is whether SMEs have access to federal government contracts. For example, in the government enterprise network service initiative I have been talking about, it is very clear that small and medium enterprises will be excluded from the process and will be relegated to subcontracting.

Committee members were told not to worry, that small and medium enterprises will still be able to operate. But what about the big companies, the big box corporations, the multinationals? The committee was told that the big multinational corporations did not necessarily have the competencies that small and medium enterprises have. As a result, they will recruit and steal employees from the small and medium enterprises by making promises of better working conditions, better salaries and better contracts. The SME that was raided will then have to shut down, since it can no longer offer the service. Inevitably, the owner will beg for a job from the multinational, where he will often be hired as cheap labour. This was demonstrated and spoken about in committee. I thought it was important for my colleagues in the House to be aware of what happens when these megacontracts are awarded.

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If we had seen a business case, as the Auditor General of Canada requested, perhaps the members of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates—of which I am a member—might have a better understanding of what is behind this. They might have a better idea of the real reason Public Works and Government Services Canada is awarding these megacontracts and weakening small and medium enterprises in Quebec and Canada. Unfortunately, we do not have any numbers. They did not give us anything. They testified before the committee and gave very vague answers to our questions.

I believe that the situation is extremely serious, especially since the Minister of Public Works told us not to worry when he testified before the committee. He said that everything would be fine. I think that he may not have known all about the issue at that point. I do not believe he deliberately or knowingly meant to deceive us. In my opinion, he was not aware of what was going on, because he told us that there would never be megacontracts for professional services.

● (1535)

Yet this past summer, Public Works and Government Services Canada issued solicitations of interest and qualification, continued going ahead with these megacontracts and even changed the terminology. There is no longer any reference to “professional services”. The term “managed services” is used now, to fool people.

We want the minister to be aware of this. If he did not act deliberately, then he may, perhaps, have been deceived, but I wonder.

The study by the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates began with the specific issue of how information technology contracts were handled, but went on to examine a much broader subject—access by small and medium enterprises to the federal procurement process—and culminated in the report we are discussing today, which is entitled “In Pursuit of Balance: Assisting Small and Medium Enterprises in Accessing Federal Procurement”.

The seventh report of the committee suggests the following:

The federal government must ensure that due consideration is given to small and medium enterprises when considering the bundling of contracts and standing offers.

There were a lot of recommendations. The committee worked very hard on this report and asked Public Works and Government Services Canada to be fair and honest, to explain the situation to us and to help our small and medium enterprises.

Two recommendations in particular appeared in the report. The first reads as follows:

Provide ample opportunity for SME consultation about contracts that are to be bundled.

So far, they have not been given that opportunity. At the very least, the government should ask them what they think. And once it asks them, it needs to take actually their thoughts into account. We realized that it was not taking these ideas into account.

The second reads as follows:

Require any department or agency who wishes to put a bundled contract up for tender to submit a business case justifying the need for bundling that responds to the Treasury Board Secretariat’s definition of business case and as requested by the Office of the Auditor General in its November 2006 report.

They have definitions. Unfortunately, Public Works and Government Services Canada has not done this. It tends to proceed haphazardly. The Auditor General asked for this in her 2006 report. Bundling contracts is not a new issue. We have been talking about it for some time now.

In its response to the report, the government called the definition of contract consolidation anecdotal and claimed that it does not really happen. But it also said that its definition of contract consolidation would be finalized by 2011. It was very evasive in response to the explicit request for business cases and more or less avoided the issue.

Is that because government officials are tired of dealing with small contracts and would rather hand everything over to multinationals so that they do not have to manage it themselves? There may be other factors at play. Maybe some individuals have insinuated themselves into the federal government and have lobbied for megacontracts. Members of the committee have to look into that possibility as well. This is about justice and honesty.

I mentioned four other contracts. The committee examined the free-standing office furniture contract. People complained about it. That was exactly the same thing.

Today, I would like to draw the House’s attention to what is currently going on with federal government procurement in terms of the small and medium enterprises that are the cornerstone of the Canadian economy and the Quebec economy. They are the ones who keep the economy running. Yes, there are big multinational corporations, but we need small companies too. Right now, the government is committing a kind of genocide with respect to our small and medium enterprises because the SMEs no longer have or will no longer have access to federal government contracts.

● (1540)

Beyond a protectionist policy, that is not even—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order, please. Questions and comments. The hon. member for Saint-Maurice—Champlain.

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Madam Speaker, I listened carefully to my colleague’s speech.

I would like to ask her if the committee examined the following specific issue, either in its report or elsewhere. By calling for more contracts for small and medium-sized businesses, considering that the government seems to grant a lot more contracts to large firms, did the committee examine whether this would not result in the government giving out a lot more contracts under \$25,000? Those contracts can often be put out according to the rules, without invitations to tender.

That is something I have observed in the past in my work with the Public Accounts Committee. I was wondering if this was taken into account in the committee’s recommendations.

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Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Madam Speaker, in response to my colleague I would say that the committee members do not necessarily want more going out to small and medium-sized businesses. What the committee wants is for the interests of small and medium-sized businesses to be taken into account when megacontracts are being awarded.

Before a megacontract is awarded, perhaps government officials could look at this issue and consider how many small and medium-sized businesses receive government contracts and rely on them for their survival. How many small and medium-sized businesses will go under if megacontracts are awarded? Will that be viable? This is what we are wondering.

Regarding contracts under \$25,000, I must admit we did not examine this aspect, since that was not our role. Such contracts can indeed be awarded by the Department of Public Works. I believe the committee put its trust in the fact that there are other parties that can assess the value of the contracts awarded.

What is important about this is knowing, when an IT contract is awarded to Bell Canada or Telus, for example, how many employees of small and medium-sized businesses will lose their jobs? That is what is important.

• (1545)

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my fellow member of the government operations committee, my colleague from Terrebonne—Blainville, Quebec, not only for the speech she has made and the points she very ably outlined for us today, but for the dedication and commitment she has shown on that committee in the interests of small and medium size enterprises in this country and the people who are seeking to take part in the opportunities created by government procurement. She has shown dedication in ensuring that Canadian enterprises have at least fair access to these opportunities.

I would like to know her views on the report we made jointly. Perhaps she would care to expand on the information regarding the Office of Small and Medium Enterprises as it compares to evidence we heard on the American office for small and medium size enterprises. I notice there was a distinct difference between the two operations, and perhaps she could enlighten the House as to some of those differences.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague. I did not get to talk about that in my speech because I ran out of time.

We have learned that the government, under the former minister who is no longer in the House now, established the Office of Small and Medium Enterprises. The purpose of this office is to promote SMEs with respect to federal government procurement. Its mandate is as follows:

OSME improves SMEs access to government contract opportunities by reducing procurement barriers, simplifying the contracting process, providing advice to SMEs wishing to do business with the government, collaborating to improve procurement policies and best practices and working with SMEs to ensure their concerns are brought forward and heard.

This office was established in 2005. When SMEs appeared as witnesses before the committee, members of the committee were surprised to hear that they were unaware of the Office of Small and Medium Enterprises.

This office has a \$7 million budget and employs 25 people in six regions in the country. We might have expected that OSME, an agency that takes into account the interests of small and medium enterprises, would question Public Works and Government Services Canada on the megaprojects it is moving ahead with, since they are going to affect small and medium enterprises. That was not the case.

In the United States there is an office where small and medium enterprises can have access to almost every government contract. A percentage was set and it is not be lowered. If it was decided that 50% of small and medium enterprises in the U.S. should get government contracts, then they make sure that happens. That is not the case here.

I am not saying we have to follow the U.S. model, but the mechanisms we have in place do not seem to be working. If that is the case, then we have to protect our SMEs another way.

[*English*]

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Madam Speaker, just bridging from what the hon. member, my colleague from our committee, was speaking about regarding the difference between the American experience and the Canadian experience, I think it is interesting that in Canada, every year for the last number of years, we have seen an increase in the dollar value of contracts that have been going to small and medium size companies in this country.

That is point number one. Canada is doing very well in extending government contracts to small and medium-sized businesses.

The second point is that the Americans have an office. I forget the exact name of it, but it is similar to our office responsible for small and medium size businesses. In the United States only 23% of government contracts go to small and medium size businesses.

Here in Canada we have almost twice that uptake in terms of the number of contracts that are extended to small and medium size businesses. As a matter of fact 43% of the contracts that public works extends are extended to small and medium size businesses.

Therefore, seeing the increase in contracts that are extended to small and medium size businesses and seeing the success that we are experiencing in Canada, would the hon. member not congratulate the government as we continue to see that exhibited?

• (1550)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. member for Terrebonne—Blainville has only one minute to respond.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Madam Speaker, what the member just said is completely false. That is the government's response. We were told that the total value of contracts awarded to SMEs increased from 34% to 49%, when contracts to major foreign multinationals were excluded. We worked four hours on these figures. Clearly the member is wrong.

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The number of SMEs that do business with the government dropped by 1,763 and the number of SME transactions by 3,203. Since 2005-06, the total value of contracts completed by SMEs also declined.

I am not in the habit of speaking without knowing my facts—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. member for Peace River.

[*English*]

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak, and maybe during my time I can rebut some of the information that the member opposite was trying to put forward.

I notice that this is a concurrence motion. It might be of some interest to members of the House and people who are watching to know that this motion was unanimously brought forward by our committee. All parties were in agreement.

If the hon. member were to read the committee's report, which she voted for and agreed to, she would find that there is a difference in terms of what she said this afternoon and what she actually agreed to in the report. The numbers that I have spoken about are in that report. This report was voted for by the hon. member, and the numbers are there for all to see.

I am disappointed that the opposition has decided to take this time to pull away from an opportunity to speak about Bill C-57, which is the free trade agreement with Jordan that is being proposed by the government. It is going to make a significant difference for many of our companies that continue to try to find access into markets for products that are being produced here in Canada. This is something that a lot of Canadians are concerned about.

Obviously, since we started this debate this afternoon, we are going to discuss the access that small businesses have to government contracts. I am pleased to have an opportunity to join members in the House in debating this because I think there is a really good news story to be told as it relates to our government and the work that we are doing and as it relates to what all parties in committee recommended.

The committee did bring forward a report entitled "In Pursuit of Balance: Assisting Small and Medium Enterprises in Accessing Federal Procurement". There were a number of recommendations that all parties agreed to, because we all understand that small businesses are integral to this country, that they are very important to the economy. Our economy will recover only when small businesses are doing well, and we all understand that.

Our government is working very hard on all fronts to create a positive business environment for all small and medium-sized businesses. One of the most important ways we can help small and medium size businesses is to get overall benefits as well as access to government contracts for them.

As the government's chief purchaser, Public Works and Government Services Canada is responsible for approximately 85% in dollar terms of the \$12 billion to \$18 billion spent every year by the Government of Canada on goods and services.

Since 2006 this department has awarded on average more than 43% of the total value of these contracts with businesses located in Canada to small and medium size businesses.

In 2008-09 the value of the contracts awarded by public works to small and medium size businesses and enterprises here in Canada was increased from \$4.8 billion to \$5.5 billion, which represents a 14.5% increase in absolute value.

This government has recognized for some time the need to make it easier for small and medium size businesses to do business with the Government of Canada. Our government has taken a two-pronged approach in doing this: on one hand, by reaching out and having a direct dialogue with the companies that want to do business with the government, to hear their concerns and lend support in any way that we can; and on the other hand, by streamlining the procurement process to ensure that procurement and renewals are done in a way that is conducive to small businesses and that ensures they have access to this information.

As a government, we strongly endorse what the committee has brought forward, the first goal of which was the improvement of the procurement process in order to facilitate small and medium size businesses' awareness of federal government contracts. We know that if small and medium size businesses are not aware of contracts, it is very difficult for them to access them.

First, we want to reduce the procurement barriers for small and medium size businesses.

Second, we want to simplify the contract process so that small and medium size businesses do not have to spend, in some cases, thousands of dollars to hire analysts and people to write their contracts. We want to simplify that so that small and medium size businesses have an opportunity to actually bid on these contracts.

● (1555)

Third, we want to provide training and education for small and medium size businesses that wish to do business with the government.

Fourth, we want to collaborate to improve procurement policies and practices.

Finally, we want to ensure that the concerns of SMEs are heard.

Under the action plan that relates to procurement within the government and the Federal Accountability Act, the office that gets the information out to small and medium size businesses was expanded and has six regional offices across the country. I know my hon. colleague actually did, in fact, admit that there was this office, that it was in place, and that there were six different offices across the country to ensure that every region has representation and the ability to go to this office to get information.

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This office has done a number of things, including accumulating a pretty impressive group of statistics. It has directly assisted, in this year alone, 23,000 business people. When the hon. member states that people do not know about this office, that small and medium size businesses do not know about this business, I can assure the member that there are at least 23,000 Canadian businesses that are acutely aware of this office because they have actually been assisted by this office. It is important that Canadians hear this, that they know this, and that they are aware that this in fact is happening.

Speaking on the recommendations of goal number one, Public Works has already made a number of improvements to make the procurement process even more user friendly for suppliers, such as covering the fees of MERX. For those people who do not know what MERX is, it is the computer system that allows companies that want to engage in government procurement to see the types of things that they can bid on.

In addition, the government is developing a comprehensive e-strategy for improving the web presence for procurement that will incorporate 24/7, one-stop access to information on how and what it can sell the government. The first stage of this strategy will be launched this spring, so members can see that things continue to improve and our committee has played an important role in that improvement.

This winter Public Works is expected to launch a new seminar for suppliers on how to complete solicitation documents. Furthermore, the Office of Small and Medium Enterprises will be developing a governance process framework for the management of commodities that will make it easier for small and medium-sized businesses to provide comment to the government as well.

Our committee had a second point in the report, and it is to encourage further coordination of federal services and programs for small and medium size businesses to assist them in their abilities to access government contracts. To address this, the government will, among other measures, clarify roles and responsibilities in the forthcoming policy that will ensure OSME as the entity advocating on behalf of suppliers in procurement. That is an important and remarkable change and it speaks to some of the concerns my hon. colleague across the way has brought up.

Similarly, a planned Treasury Board directive governing Crown procurement will reflect the need for coordination among departments in support of the government's socio-economic objectives, including those that relate to small and medium-sized businesses.

I know that this was an issue that the hon. member, as well as my fellow colleague from Winnipeg who sits on the committee as well, had brought to our attention as a concern, and so the government is addressing these things that the hon. members of our committee actually brought forward. This is good news.

The formation of an interdepartmental committee on SMEs' concerns related to procurement, comprised of senior executives from relevant departments, will provide assurances that these matters are brought to the attention of the highest levels of government.

The concerns of small and medium-sized businesses are not going to just stay at the lowest level of the bureaucracy. They are going to be brought up to the highest level of government. This is because our

committee has brought forward recommendations that were supported by all members, and activity and movement is happening.

• (1600)

Again, I think it is a little bit premature for the hon. member from the Bloc Québécois to be bringing this issue forward today. I am concerned that this is just a diversion from what we should be discussing in the House this afternoon.

The third goal of our committee's report states that the government must be mindful of SMEs when considering the bundling of contracts and standing offers, and the definition of a contract consolidation. We as a committee had some concerns about what we were hearing in the field. We were hearing from people who were saying that they were concerned about the possibility that bundled contracts would cut out a number of people from being able to bid.

We heard from people and we brought forward this recommendation that there be a clarification of what the government was going to do. The government has come forward and has said that it is going to create what will be a definition of contract consolidation and a review of best practices relating to the part of this policy and how it develops going forward. The government is responding to this.

The framework that it is talking about and establishing at this point will serve to ensure that any contract consolidation is properly justified. Different departments will not be able to bundle contracts simply because it is expedient. We as a committee have brought forward the concern that many people could be cut out if these contracts are bundled and only large companies can bid on them.

Clearly, the government is responding and saying that it is not going to do that. It is going to create a justification process. If departments want to do this, they are going to have to consider the small businesses, and they are also going to have to justify why they are bundling before they bundle. This is good news.

The fourth point that we had within our report applied to concerns about the system of fairness to encourage departments and agencies to use SMEs, but we specified that we were not going to go down the American experience and use just set-asides. We did not believe that small and medium-sized businesses needed a set-aside.

Again, we know that 43% of our contracts given to Canadian companies are given to small and medium-sized businesses. The United States has quite a different situation, where 23% of its contracts go to small and medium-sized businesses as it relates to government contracts. We as a committee decided that we did not want to replicate the American system, where it needed set-asides. As a matter of fact, even though it was being contemplated, the reason that we said that we would not have set-asides is because industry rejected it 100%. I am talking about the small and medium-sized business.

They said that they could compete with the best of them. They said that if they were given a fair and even playing field, they would compete fairly and win contracts. I strongly believe that. I think that colleagues from the other parties believe that, too. That is why we said that, if small and medium-sized businesses did not want to create set-asides, we would not do that.

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We also recommended that departments were fair and that they had fairness monitors to ensure that they were contemplating the needs and concerns of small and medium-sized businesses. Another concern that we heard from some small and medium-sized businesses is that the way in which the call for proposals was brought forward, sometimes limiting a small or medium-sized business that had a very innovative product.

We heard from a computer company here in Ottawa that said that it had a program that would be much more efficient than the systems that are here today, but because its system was so much better than the other ones and because the call for procurement was for a different system, it could not get on it, even though if the system were replaced, it would be much more efficient and a lot better for the government in the long run. Our committee brought forward that recommendation and the government is responding. We can see that from what it has done in a number of different areas.

Finally, our committee recommended a fifth goal. We called on the government to ensure that innovation and quality are key determinants in the evaluation of bids in awarding contracts.

●(1605)

We heard from a number of groups. I just mentioned the computer company that had an innovative product it wanted to bring forward and highlight its qualities and the things that were so good about it, but it said that there was resistance because it was not like the systems in place right now. We as a committee said that, in fact, this should happen, and I think there was agreement all around the table.

We heard from engineers. We heard from people who said that the government should consider not only the price but the quality. Where a product might be cheaper than another product, if the quality of the second product is much better, in the long run the government might save money if it went with the more expensive but higher quality product.

We saw in the Speech from the Throne of 2008, it could not have been more blunt in terms of the response. There was a number of different things within the Speech from the Throne that addressed some of these concerns in terms of cutting the red tape to allow for these innovative products to be brought forward and a number of other things.

I get to the end and kind of wonder again aloud, why are we discussing it this afternoon? Clearly, the government is responding to all five concerns that were addressed in our committee. The hon. member has a legitimate interest and we should be discussing these types of things in our committee. We have an opportunity in the next number of weeks to have new things brought to our committee. If we want to build on this report or if we want to review successes or see if in fact these things are moving along, we have opportunities.

I do not know what benefit it is to bring it to the House this afternoon because clearly all five recommendations within our report are being addressed by the government. All of these are moving along and clearly things do not change overnight in government, we recognize that, but I am quite frankly shocked that the hon. member would consider what has happened as not being a major success. I am at a little bit of a loss.

I just came from the industry committee. I actually ran over here to speak to this issue. I had an opportunity to speak to the analyst. It was on a different subject, but it was just fortuitous that I was speaking to him. He told me he has a colleague in the industry department who is actually working specifically on this. They are actually streamlining the process to ensure that high tech companies that are not necessarily big companies can bid on government contracts. There is a whole process. He was telling me his colleague is working in industry to do this, but he says there are colleagues in every department who are undertaking these policies as to how they might reduce the access to government contracts.

Number one, there is a cut in the MERX fee, so these small and medium-sized companies do not have to do that. Number two, these companies do not have to hire people to write these long proposals. He explained to me that in some cases companies have had to spend over \$150,000 to write these reports, and clearly, many small businesses cannot do that so they are actually re-writing the policy so that the contracts are simple and much easier to fill out.

Clearly, we see it even today, having spoken to an analyst within the industry department, that these things are happening, they are moving along, and the only thing left to say is congratulations to the minister. He is doing an excellent job and we are looking forward to even greater things coming out as he continues to respond to the concerns brought forward by our committee in a report. I am certain that if my colleagues from the committee are interested in continuing this dialogue, we will have an opportunity to expand on this report in our committee.

●(1610)

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened very carefully to what the hon. member from the Conservative Party said. I was intrigued when he talked about how his government is supporting and wants to support small and medium-sized enterprises.

We certainly believe in that on the Liberal side. In 1993 we identified that it was the engine that would drive our economy. The employers told us then that if we lowered EI premiums, or taxes they called them, they would reinvest. We did that, and there was about fourteen point something billion dollars over the years.

I want to ask the hon. member a very simple question. Does he believe in what the Prime Minister said when he was a member of the Reform Party, that a tax like EI on jobs is a killer of jobs; it destroys jobs? If indeed he believes in what the current Prime Minister said, then a member of Parliament from Alberta from the Reform Party, then why, I ask him, is the government raising EI and taxing jobs out of Canada to the tune of \$15.5 billion? Will he tell the Prime Minister to take that out of the budget?

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Madam Speaker, I am a little at a loss as to how the hon. member can stand in the House and talk about EI.

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I know that is a bit of a segue from what we are talking about today. We are talking about procurement and small businesses, the latter being the engine of growth in all of our communities across this country. I am in agreement with the hon. member as it relates to that specific point, and I am hopeful that he believes that, though I am uncertain about it after having seen him vote against some of the most recent budget measures that significantly assist small and medium-sized businesses. I hear what he is saying but I am not certain he is following that up with action.

As it relates to the Liberals' position on EI, one thing I do recall, which continues to be an issue of contention for every person who pays into EI, is how the Liberals stripped the money that was built up in the EI fund and used it for other projects. Sponsorship was a project that was probably funded by EI funds. The money was stripped away. Therefore, if the hon. member wants to suggest how he might be able to collect those funds and give them back to the people who paid into it, that is an issue I can support. I can absolutely support that.

In terms of EI, what we—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. member for Terrebonne—Blainville.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Madam Speaker, first of all, I would like to point out that the speech by my colleague opposite is exactly the response given by the government to the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Government Operations.

Second, he talked about the Office of Small and Medium Enterprises and said that people know about this office and are pleased with it. I stated the mandate of the OSME, which is to promote and protect SMEs. The government is saying that, since it was established, the OSME has helped more than 53,000 individuals and suppliers by means of—hang on to your hats—information seminars, trade fairs and meetings. That is not at all its mandate.

I would like to ask my colleague opposite something. If he is so surprised that I am bringing up this matter today it is because something is happening. That is obvious. When the Minister of Public Works and Government Services testified before the committee, he stated that professional services would never disappear from Public Works. How is it that the terminology and the definition have changed? Now, they speak of managed services. How is it that, this summer, Public works issued a solicitation of interest when the committee had asked it to not move forward?

• (1615)

[*English*]

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Madam Speaker, there were a number of things the member brought up.

I know the hon. member has concerns about the availability of the Office of Small and Medium Enterprises. She should be encouraged that 23,000 small and medium size businesses across this country were directly assisted by this office in the last fiscal year. This is good news.

It is a new office. It is something that we as a committee said we needed to raise the profile of. We felt that the government needed to expand the profile of this office. Clearly, it is having an effect, because we are seeing an increase in the number of people who are being assisted by the office, 23,000 small and medium size businesses. That is no small feat for an office with this budget and mandate. This is very good news.

In terms of promoting and protecting small businesses and their interests, this office is undertaking all kinds of important work, including directing and providing feedback to the government about the concerns small and medium size businesses are bringing forward.

I wonder why the hon. member is not standing and congratulating this office for its work and encouraging it to continue that. If the hon. member wants to discuss the mandate or work of this office, I would encourage her to bring forward her concerns to the steering committee, which will look at the office and consider its effectiveness. That would be a good thing. It is something that would be productive in committee and I encourage her to bring it to that forum.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Questions or comments.

Does the hon. member for Winnipeg Centre have a question?

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I was actually hoping to enter into the debate, but seeing there may be competition for that, I will use my time to ask a question of my colleague instead.

I want to thank my colleague from Peace River for his speech. He was really going through the government's response to the seventh report of the government operations committee.

I would like to ask him a question as it pertains to the testimony we heard in the context of our study on small and medium size enterprises.

One of the things we heard from SMEs who testified was that two of their biggest challenges were access to venture capital and the federal tax rate on small and medium size businesses.

I do not know if my colleague is aware or if the House is aware, but in the socialist paradise of Manitoba, the small business tax rate is in fact zero, whereas the federal tax rate is 11%.

Would my colleague not agree that the federal government could take a lesson from the NDP Government of Manitoba and help small businesses by reducing the small business tax to zero?

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Madam Speaker, I think that is an excellent question. As a matter of fact, I do recall the testimony of small and medium size businesses about their access to capital, and I will just address that first.

I know this government has actively worked to ensure that capital is available for small and medium size businesses. There has been an increase in the amount of money available to both EDC and BDC so that money can flow to these small businesses to increase their ability to do business in this country. So we, as a government, are responding. There were also a number of other programs brought forward in the budget to ensure that. The Canadian secured credit facility is another one. These types of programs assist small and medium size businesses in getting access to capital.

My second point is that I support any person who will stand in this House and support the idea of lower taxes for every Canadian, and for small and medium size businesses, absolutely. I would like to recommend to the hon. member that the next time we bring forward a tax cut for small businesses, he should stand in this House and support it rather than do what the NDP so often does, and not support it.

Having said that, it is a low blow to the member from the NDP because, I have to say, I have a good working relationship with him in our committee. I hope that maybe we can have a committee meeting, and perhaps a day or two, to discuss the small business tax rate in this country and how it relates to that. I would encourage him to recommend that we move in a systematic way to get rid of taxes on small and medium size businesses. I will tell him right now that I will support that, and hopefully there will be unanimous support in the committee for that. I agree, and I will be there on that day, absolutely.

* * *

● (1620)

PRIVILEGE

REMARKS BY PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY TO THE MINISTER OF
CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege relating to a matter that was raised earlier this day on a point of order.

I have given the appropriate required notice to the Chair with regard to this matter.

In the point of order, I would just mention that the Speaker had decided that this was a matter for the committee, because the foundation for any statement that may have been made, which was offensive to me, would be found in the committee transcripts. I simply want to acknowledge that the Speaker's ruling is quite correct.

It is fortunate that we now have the second edition of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, 2009, edited by O'Brien and Bosc.

I refer specifically to two matters here with regard to privilege. The first matter is pursuant to Standing Order 18, which says in part:

No Member shall speak disrespectfully...nor use offensive words against either House, or against any Member thereof.

If I refer to O'Brien-Bosc, chapter 13, page 618, under "Unparliamentary Language" it states:

The proceedings of the House are based on a long-standing tradition of respect for the integrity of all Members. Thus, the use of offensive, provocative or threatening

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language in the House is strictly forbidden. Personal attacks, insults and obscenities are not in order.

I will also read the next sentence, which is relevant. It states:

A direct charge or accusation against a Member may be made only by way of a substantive motion for which notice is required.

Madam Speaker, this means that if a member would like to accuse another member of something in the House, they must also provide a foundation for the accusation and, in fact, the details of it.

Yesterday, in the chamber, as I have read on page 6864 of yesterday's *Hansard*, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, the member of Parliament for Peterborough, said, among other things or in part, that I had the "abhorrent behaviour of a partisan chair".

Madam Speaker, if you refer to footnote 176 in O'Brien-Bosc, you will find references to *Debates* of February 25, 1998, pages 4401-4402; and October 28, 1998, page 9512; and May 3, 2006, page 848. These are all references to words that would be described as disrespectful or offensive against a member of Parliament.

Today I offered the member for Peterborough notice of this matter and simply asked that he consider withdrawing the words and I would then not have to rise to defend myself.

Madam Speaker, I have to defend myself because if I do not, those words in the official record of *Hansard* may be interpreted by some to be true. So I have no choice but to defend myself by rising on this question of privilege.

Today in the House, and I have just printed this off from the blues, the member also raised further matters in which he questioned my person with regard to actions that I took. He referred to the member not even allowing him the opportunity to speak to a motion.

Madam Speaker, there is no substantive evidence or details in the member's statements that such is the case, and should the Speaker want to look at the committee, she will find that the reason is that the motion was out of order and inadmissible and, as a consequence, was not moveable. That is why he did not have a chance to speak, although the insinuation in his statement was that I had again done something not in accordance with the rules.

● (1625)

Based on the wisdom of O'Brien and Bosc, page 618 under "Unparliamentary Language", I believe this is a prima facie case of breach of my privileges as a member. It is also a breach of the Standing Orders, Standing Order 18.

In normal circumstances, it would be prescribed that the member be asked to withdraw the words and to apologize for the offensive language. The member has refused to co-operate in this matter and has refused to address it. In fact, he wants to challenge it. If he wants these statements to stand, he must rise in this place with a substantive motion giving foundation to the allegations that he has raised against me about my character and my abilities as a member of Parliament.

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Consequently, my privileges have been breached. I have given the member all the opportunities possible to rectify this matter. I respect the Speaker's decision that the evidence of foundation could or could not be found in the transcripts of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics of yesterday. However, since the reference in O'Brien and Bosc states that should a member want to bring:

A direct charge or accusation against a Member may be made only by way of a substantive motion for which notice is required.

That has not happened. The member should either do it or should comply with the standing practice and custom of this place which is to withdraw the words and to apologize to the House. If the member refuses to do so, I would be prepared to move an appropriate motion that this matter be taken up by possibly the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

However, the bottom line is that in this place we have had far too much dysfunction and offensive and disrespectful language of members against other members and it needs to stop. I hope that this day, the day on which the House was presented with a second edition of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, O'Brien-Bosc, be a starting point that we deal with these matters in a straightforward and respectful manner for all hon. members.

My privileges have been breached. The Standing Orders have been breached. I take it very seriously. I submit that I am prepared to move the necessary motion should the Speaker find that in fact the language used by the member was not only offensive, contrary to Standing Order 18, but also that they are without foundation because he has not moved a substantive motion to lay out the reasons why his comments have any foundation whatsoever.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I thank the hon. member for Mississauga South for raising substantive and very serious issues. Concerns about one's reputation are indeed very serious. I will take this under advisement and come back to the House to report on it if necessary. I say if necessary because there was a suggestion, as I understood it, that an apology might address the issue, so the Speaker will return to the House to report on this matter.

Before resuming 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 Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Infrastructure; the hon. member for Hull—Aylmer, Public Transit; the hon. member for Random—Burin—St. George's, Fisheries and Oceans.

* * *

●(1630)

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND ESTIMATES

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased take part in the debate on the importance of small and medium sized enterprises. This was a topic that was looked at and addressed by the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates.

It is an issue of vital importance to our economy. Even though it has been dealt with in committee and there have been recommendations coming out of our committee, any time there is an opportunity to speak to this issue, it is one that we need to take advantage of. When we have a venue, such as this one, where those engaged in small and medium sized enterprises can tune in and hear the debate about what has happened not only in committee but now here in the House of Commons, that is an opportunity we should take advantage of.

There has been a great deal of concern expressed by small and medium sized businesses about access to government contracts. When we look at the federal government and the fact that it buys approximately \$14 billion worth of goods and services each year from thousands of suppliers, it is no wonder that small and medium sized enterprises want to be able to take advantage of this opportunity.

What we heard in our committee from business people was their constant frustration at not being able to access the system in a way they could afford. What we heard from those who appeared before our committee was that the process that was in place that they had to utilize in order to access contracts and put in proposals was very cumbersome.

While it may be possible for larger businesses to take advantage and use that type of process because of the resources they have available to them, that is not the case for small and medium sized enterprises. When extra burden is put on a small and medium sized enterprise in terms of making the process so burdensome for them, they probably say that it is not worth the effort or they end up putting so much effort into it only to turn around and find that they did not win the contract. That becomes a problem for those businesses.

I think we all recognize the importance of small and medium sized enterprises in our country. In the riding of Random—Burin—St. George's, which I represent, it is certainly the backbone of the economy, as it is in the province that I represent, which is Newfoundland and Labrador. When we look at rural communities, the majority of businesses are small businesses. In fact, I would go so far as to say that there are very few medium sized enterprises in rural Canada.

It is really important that we do everything we can to assist small and medium sized business, many of which probably hire less than 10 people. The definition of a small and medium sized enterprise is 100 people or less. I would venture to say that there are lot of small businesses in our country that hire a lot fewer than 100 people and these businesses are the backbone of our economy in rural communities.

What we heard time and time again from the witnesses who appeared before our committee was just how cumbersome the process is. They came before our committee because they recognized an opportunity to actually make the case to try to get the process more streamlined and to try to get someone to accept and recognize that there are issues here in terms of small and medium sized enterprises being able to make any kind of headway in terms of being able to access government contracts.

Part of the fear that we hear all the time from small and medium sized businesses is the bundling of contracts and the fear that in bundling the contracts they will not have access to them. Larger businesses would be able to take advantage of the opportunities and then end up downloading or subcontracting business to that small or medium enterprise. What we heard was that the small and medium enterprise would like to have the opportunity to bid of its own accord.

● (1635)

Another issue that became apparent as we listened to the witnesses who appeared before us. When we talked about the value of federal government business in our country, the volume of federal contracts awarded to small and medium enterprises in 2004-05 went down from 68% to 67% in the following year and in the following year down to 64%. We saw a bit of a bump in 2007-08 to 65%. There are some very serious issues here as far as small and medium enterprises are concerned because they are gradually seeing an erosion of their access to government contracts.

We did hear overwhelming testimony that small and medium enterprises are frustrated with the federal procurement process. It is cumbersome and expensive to compete in the request for proposal process to the government and not paying interest on overdue accounts. Many small and medium enterprises have just given up trying to bid on federal government contracts.

That is serious and it is certainly serious for rural parts of our country because the majority of businesses in rural parts of Canada are small and medium sized enterprises. If they are going to give up, what does that say about the opportunity for people in rural Canada to be employed? What does that say about opportunities for people who want to stay in rural parts of our country but who, because there is no employment opportunity, will be forced to leave and move elsewhere?

The committee was trying to get a handle on what exactly the government needed to do to respond to the issues that were making it frustrating for small and medium sized enterprises.

Some of the witnesses who appeared before us were quite open about their experiences knowing full well that sometimes the committee was televised and that their names and their businesses would be used in the report. However, the level of frustration was such that it was something they were prepared to do. That tells members just how serious an issue they felt they were facing.

What was really interesting was the growing sentiment among some small and medium sized enterprises that it was not worth the effort and investment to bid on federal government procurements.

Mr. Charles Duffett, the senior vice-president and chief information officer from the Canadian Advanced Technology Alliance, provided the committee with an example of a small to medium sized enterprise that found the federal procurement process overly slow and complicated.

Liquid Computing, an Ottawa area technology business, developed a powerful computer that reduces the space and the electricity used by current data centres. According to Mr. Duffett, the board of directors at Liquid Computing gave instructions to Liquid's chief executive officer not to sell to the federal government because

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in their view, "In their view, it's a waste of time. It takes up too much energy, and nothing goes anywhere". In the two to three years it tried to sell its computers to the Canadian government, Liquid sold four units to the United States government.

That is telling when our own government has a process in place that is so burdensome that a company looking to sell its product must look elsewhere and must give up on the federal government.

● (1640)

The committee also heard testimony detailing other barriers in the procurement process that small and medium-sized enterprises faced when trying to bid for federal contracts. For instance, in testimony before the committee, the Business and Institutional Furniture Manufacturers Association, an organization that leads, advocates, informs and develops standards for the North American office and institutional furniture industry, stated that the industry had perceived that public works had "moved from a historically inclusive procurement process to a more exclusive process".

We heard this time and time again from witnesses who appeared before our committee, so much so that witnesses were brought in to find out if in fact this was the case for all small and medium-sized enterprises. Unfortunately, we heard it was a serious issue.

We have made recommendations as a committee and the federal government has acted on some of those recommendations. However, it is important for us to speak to the issues today so people will have a real appreciation of how difficult it is for those businesses on which we come to depend for employment to perform in our country.

We heard similar testimony from the shipbuilding industry. The shipbuilding industry has a very high profile in my riding. In fact, we are looking at building boats of all sorts and we are looking at an opportunity to access federal contracts. However, it appears that accessing those contracts is a very cumbersome process.

There is another small business, with about 100 employees, in my hometown called Dynamic Air Shelters. It is looking to access federal government contracts through the Department of National Defence. Again, I am constantly hearing the refrain over and over that the process is too complicated. The amount of work required to complete a request for a proposal is such that, if a business does not have 10, 20 or 30 people who are designated to do nothing but complete the RFP, then there is no way it will even have a chance of being in the ball game.

It is a serious issue. We have to look at the importance of small and medium enterprises. We have to do everything we can to ensure they can access federal government contracts. With \$14 billion worth of contracts, there should be no reason why small and medium enterprises cannot access a significant portion of that business.

When we talk about trying to respond to the concerns that were brought before the committee, the committee came up with several goals.

The first is the procurement process must be improved for small and medium enterprises to facilitate their awareness of and access to federal contracts. We heard time and time again how important it was that this be achieved.

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We were also told about the importance of coordinating federal programs for small and medium enterprises. Having to deal with so many different departments became an issue for them as well. That is why it was important to talk to the CEO of the Office of Small and Medium Enterprises, the office that was created in the fall of 2005 to address the concerns of SMEs.

Even though that office was created in 2005, four years ago, we still hear these concerns from small and medium-sized enterprises. If we have an office that has been put in place to deal with the issues that small and medium-sized enterprises have been raising, why are we still hearing, again and again, that these issues still exist?

• (1645)

It was interesting to speak to the CEO of the office and again to hear the inroads and changes she was trying to make to try to accommodate small and medium-sized enterprises. There is still a lot of work to be done and we need to ensure that this office has all the resources it needs to respond to the concerns being raised by small and medium-sized enterprises.

The chair of the Canadian Business Information Technology Network told the committee that he found the office had no power and could only act in an advisory role, and that was serious to hear. He really did not think the office had any teeth, that it really could not deliver on behalf of small and medium enterprises, that it really was not in a position to change what was happening throughout the federal government in terms of making it more acceptable to small and medium-sized enterprises. He continued by noting that the office should have more clout to deal with the recommendations of the information technology industry on how to protect small and medium enterprises.

Appearing before our committee as a witness was the chair of the Canadian Business Information Technology Network. It was a follow-up to what the gentleman had already had tried to do to somehow make things easier for small and medium enterprises, especially in the information technology area. Appearing before the committee was something he saw as an avenue that he could pursue because the changes that he had looked for and hoped to see come about as a result of the OSMA still had not happened.

A gentleman from the Nanaimo Shipyard Group suggested that the office should consider focusing its research on regional spending by the federal government. If it spends a large majority of its money in one area, then it should be looking at whether small and medium enterprises are well represented.

Again, this is something we continued to hear, that there really was no emphasis being put on the importance of small and medium-sized enterprises. Request for proposals were put out there and anyone could access them and fill them out. However, the sense was that in some instances, the process was not at all meant to accommodate small and medium enterprises. That is a serious concern for those of us who are familiar with the importance of small and medium-sized enterprises.

If something is not done, if the recommendations that came out of our committee are not followed, then we will find ourselves in a situation where again we will have a committee looking at the importance of small and medium enterprises, looking at trying to do

what needs to be done to accommodate them to ensure they continue to operate as part of our economy in a way that is fulfilling and profitable for them.

However, if a company gives up on the federal government because it thinks it is a waste of time, a waste of money and a waste of energy, but can sell its product into the U.S., what does that tell us about what small and medium-sized enterprises have to endure in order to do business in Canada?

We really need to make changes that will be accommodating to small and medium-sized enterprises. I am hopeful the recommendations that came out of our committee will be followed. It is really important for people to know that those recommendations exist and that we are doing everything we can as a committee to ensure that their concerns are being addressed.

• (1650)

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is interesting to be in the House to hear what is in fact quite a rehash of what the committee heard and the recommendations that were brought forward. It almost seems the hon. member from that time forward has not kept up with what has happened in this area.

I know she expressed interest in the committee and it may be something the committee could look at to update ourselves and become aware of the successes that have resulted from the committee's report.

I note the hon. member talked about the cost and complexity of small businesses trying to compete for government contracts. Significant things have been done so small and medium-sized businesses have access to government contracts, such as the ability to go on MERX and not have to pay the fee and the reduction in the size of contracts, so they, with the resources they have, can fill out the requests for proposal.

The hon. member talked about needing 12 or 13 people to fill in the requests. Many of the departments already have a streamlined process for small and medium-sized businesses specifically so they do not have to pay thousands and thousands of dollars to hire consultants to fill out the complex RFPs. That is done, it is being done and it is a great thing. Maybe this is news to the hon. member and it will be helpful to her.

The other thing I think she would recognize is the success of the Office of Small and Medium Enterprises, with 23,000 companies being assisted.

Would the hon. member be interested in looking at the current state so we can review it and be updated on it in committee rather than here in the House and would she not be interested in hearing more? Clearly—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. member for Random—Burin—St. George's.

Ms. Judy Foote: Madam Speaker, I am going to ignore the sleight in my colleague's remarks. We work well in committee and that is fine.

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I am well aware of what has been done. I am also aware that issues still need to be addressed. I continue to get representations from small and medium-sized enterprises that really need more, and we need to do more.

While I accept what my colleague has said, and again I am well aware of what has taken place, the issue is we need to respond, in whatever way we can, to try to ensure that whatever concerns, issues and needs small and medium-sized enterprises have, that they are indeed dealt with.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am realizing today that we did not give this topic enough attention in committee. The committee must continue its examination. I asked that we bring in industry representatives to give us more information.

Is my colleague worried about that famous draft that was issued this summer by Public Works and Government Services Canada? I am talking about the solicitation of interest that Public Works issued this summer, in which the terms were changed, perhaps to confuse the members sitting around the committee table. Now, we talk about managed services instead of professional services.

Nevertheless, a solicitation of interest was issued even though the committee had asked the department to wait before going ahead with its plan to bundle contracts, and even though small and medium enterprises had said they were concerned about the way government contracts would be awarded from now on, especially in the information technology field.

• (1655)

[*English*]

Ms. Judy Foote: Madam Speaker, in response to that, yes, I am concerned, and that is the genesis of my concern with respect to what is happening with small and medium size enterprises. It seems that when we go down one path, we are assured that things are being addressed and that there is no need for concern any more, but then we turn around and there is a different approach being taken, and we have no idea where it came from.

So, my concern, again, for small and medium size enterprises is that on the one hand we are being told one thing, and as a committee we might feel comfortable with that, but on the other hand, we are hearing about things that are happening which are just not at all in keeping with what we would like to see for small and medium size enterprises.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Madam Speaker, it is great that the Liberal member is concerned about small and medium enterprises, particularly given that we all know that very small enterprises are the ones that, in very many cases, do the work and fill jobs in various regions and sectors.

However, in this context, the government and Public Works and Government Services Canada seem to want to bundle four megacontracts worth nearly \$1 billion each per year. They say that there will not be a problem and that they will use small and medium enterprises, distribute the work fairly and get them involved.

Does the member believe that the huge corporations that get these megacontracts will automatically do everything in their power not to use small enterprises, but to reduce costs as much as possible? If so, then small enterprises that the government does business with through intermediaries will continue to suffer the most and probably experience additional job losses.

[*English*]

Ms. Judy Foote: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question and the observation. The member is right. It is an issue.

Certainly it is an issue that I have heard about from small and medium size enterprises, the whole idea of bundling and small and medium size enterprises being able to access a significant portion of the contract or even being given the amounts that they require in order to do the work. It is a serious issue. I have heard from small and medium size enterprises that they really do feel they are being left out. When we talk about bundling, the concerns of the small and medium size enterprises are on the back burner because the focus is on the larger enterprises that in fact win the contract. I would say that at the end of the day we will not know, we will never know, if we do not do everything we can and ensure that the government does everything it can, so that small and medium size enterprises are protected in this kind of an environment.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): There is time for a very brief question. There is a minute and a half left. The hon. member for Peace River.

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Madam Speaker, I hope that the hon. member did not take my earlier comments as a slight. I do apologize if the hon. member took any offence. I think what she has brought forward is important, in terms of concerns that she has, and I think this is something that we, as government and as members of all parties, need to address.

In terms of the bundling, she talks about it as it was current when we were discussing it at our committee. The government has responded to concerns related to bundling. There has been a decision by government such that if departments have any desire to bundle contracts, they have to have a strong argument for doing so. In fact, they have told departments that they should resist bundling. So, clearly, this is a step in the right direction.

I wonder if the hon. member would take the opportunity to say, yes, in fact, even on this issue, there is progress and we hope—

• (1700)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order, please. I would like to give the hon. member for Random—Burin—St. George's the opportunity to respond. There is 35 seconds left.

Ms. Judy Foote: Madam Speaker, with respect to what has in fact transpired with bundling and with departments being advised that they should not bundle, I think members will appreciate if I am a little circumspect and if small and medium size enterprises are a little circumspect, given the history. We will need to see that indeed things are transpiring as they should. Again, circumspection is, I guess, the name of the game today, and we are just a little nervous about what will happen.

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am glad to join the debate today on the concurrence motion on the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates as it pertains to small and medium size enterprises and their access to federal procurement contracts.

I am proud to be the vice-chair of the committee and was proud to participate in the study that resulted in this report. It was a unanimous report. There was not a great deal of argument or debate about the content of the report.

My colleague from the Bloc Québécois felt it was necessary to move concurrence on this report today because the same issues that gave rise to the investigation and the study continue to plague small businesses today as they seek access to their fair share of government procurement contracts.

I want to thank my colleague from Terrebonne—Blainville, Quebec for the opportunity for us to speak at some length today on this subject.

Let me begin my remarks by pointing out that 98% of all businesses in Canada in fact fall into the small and medium size business category. I learned something when that was brought to our attention. I had no idea.

Even more noteworthy is the fact that SMEs employ 5.1 million Canadians, almost half of the entire private-sector workforce. In fact small businesses accounted for 80% of the job creation between 1993 and 2007. During that period of time, large businesses actually shed jobs. It was the large enterprises that were cutting back and reducing staff. The engine for economic growth, almost the entire backbone of the economy during that period was the job creation from small and medium size enterprises.

We can see why the government should have a real interest in making sure that the procurement by the federal government, which represents a huge volume of financial activity, goes to the sector of the economy that will give the biggest bang for its buck. We argue, and the committee unanimously concluded, that is the small and medium size sector, the SME sector.

However, let me quote from the seventh report of the government operations committee, and this is in the very neutral language put forward by the researcher of our committee, who crafted this report:

The Committee heard overwhelming testimony that SMEs are frustrated with the federal procurement process. From cumbersome and expensive-to-complete RFP processes to the government not paying interest on overdue accounts, many SMEs "have just given up" trying to bid on federal government contracts.

That was the unanimously adopted language of this report. Even the government-side members of the committee did not disagree that this was what our committee heard from small and medium size enterprises. They are frustrated by the process and by the government not paying interest on overdue accounts to the point where they have simply given up. They have found it too expensive and too cumbersome to even participate in the bidding process to get access to the tax dollars being invested.

I do not know if it is a deliberate trend. We did not prove that. We did not prove that it was the policy of the government to simplify its procurement by going sole-source or going to larger enterprises,

especially in the IT sector. We do know that the bundling of contracts, especially in the IT sector, has shut out a vast number of actors in that sector. They are justifiably frustrated.

It was a satisfying committee study to take part in, because we heard real passion from real actors in the economy.

• (1705)

We were not dealing with abstracts in this study. We were right down on the ground with the people who are the driving engine of the economy, and they were telling us that the system is broken. Access to government procurement contracts is so frustrating. The wheels have fallen off it. The arse is out of her, as they say in Newfoundland. It is simply not working for them. Therefore, they came to us; they appealed to us; they urged us in the strongest possible terms to bring the message back to government that they want in.

There used to be a saying, the west wants in. Well, SMEs want in, in a substantive way, and they asked us to bring that message to Parliament. We did through this report, but what has been frustrating to us, and I know it has been frustrating to my colleague from the Bloc Québécois, is that the government's response to our report is inadequate. I do not think the Conservatives heard us in any meaningful way. The language they use does not reflect the urgency in our report.

Let me give one example to illustrate what I think is a wilful blindness on the part of the government to the urgency in this sector. Our goal number three said simply that

[t]he federal government must ensure that due consideration is given to small and medium enterprises when considering the bundling of contracts and standing offers.

The response from the government is that it commits to "review best practices related to the consolidation of contracts".

Everybody who has been around here for a while knows that is baffle-gab for stall, delay, rag the puck, buy ourselves some time, status quo. That is what it really means. "We will review best practices" means we will do absolutely SFA, if I may put it that way.

That is a very frustrating response to one of the key recommendations. I want to share what we heard about the bundling of contracts. There seems to be a feeling on the part of government that bigger is better in terms of dealing with one big supplier instead of many small ones, but that way of thinking, that logic is folly. In fact, I argue, it is dangerous, because if we put all our eggs in one basket, especially with our relationship with an IT contractor who is essentially supplying our mainframe and then providing that main government service of IT connectivity, we are vulnerable; we are at risk. I would argue it is an issue of national security, but it is certainly at least a danger in that we have contracted out the ability to service our own systems. We have contracted them all out to one entity that may or may not be stable in the long term, that may be sold, that may merge with other companies, that may have its own internal difficulties, or that may turn into an Enron and have a terrible corporate collapse.

Routine Proceedings

The government has put us at risk if it goes to that single entity, plus there is the other effect that we are concerned about. Some of these big actors, the ones that seem to get the big bundled contracts, are major Canadian success stories. We bless them for their success. We wish them well, but we will never grow another generation of success stories if we let them starve for business. Unless some of the smaller actors get a piece of the action, they will never grow into big actors, hire more people and become international players as some of the big contractors are now.

It is only reasonable that we want to patronize the developing sector, the entrepreneurial sector, the small and medium size businesses that will become our next major players in the IT sector. That work should be spread around for national security reasons, for reliability reasons and for the reasons of providing better opportunity to more players in the field so that we can grow another generation of entrepreneurs.

Above and beyond all that, there remains the question of why we are contracting this work out to begin with. There is a pretty good argument. We are not like any other business. This is the Government of Canada. There are security issues and there are compelling reasons why this should be kept in-house, that the design, the operation, the repair and maintenance of our internal communications, our IT component for the Government of Canada, should not be contracted out to the private sector, because we do not know if we can guarantee the security once the control of it leaves our hands.

● (1710)

I wish there had been more of an emphasis on that in the study that we undertook. It was not part of our mandate, but I think it is worth noting in the context of this debate.

Another thing that is worth noting in the context of this debate is that the expenditure of Canadian tax dollars should be done in such a way as to provide as much benefit to Canadian taxpayers as possible. That means not only achieving the initial objective of the spending, the procurement of goods and services, but hopefully achieving secondary objectives as well, such as providing jobs and opportunities for Canadians. That means to the greatest extent possible we should be buying Canadian goods and services, within the limitations of the trade agreements that we are a signatory to and that we have ratified. We should be knocking ourselves out. We should be going the extra mile to make sure that we are buying Canadian goods and services and IT whenever possible. Let me give one example where we have fallen down in that regard and I think it will shock the House.

The Canadian military needed troop carrier buses. The forces already have a whole fleet of Canadian made buses. They needed 32 new ones. A tender was put out for new buses. There were only two bidders. One was a company in Quebec that makes some of the best carrier buses in the world, I argue the second best, because there is another company in Winnipeg that makes what I argue are the best buses in the world. Both of those bus companies bid on the Canadian armed forces' troop carrier tender. Who got it? Mercedes Benz in Germany. The really shocking is that the difference in price was less than one-half of one per cent. That is by how much it won the contract, less than the cost of a set of tires on one of those buses is

what it won the contract by, but lowest bid gets it. Unless there are three Canadian bidders, the made in Canada procurement policy does not kick in.

What kind of a message does this send to our NATO allies around the world and in foreign theatres of operation? It says that if they want to buy a good troop carrier bus, they should buy a German one, because that is what we did. We abandoned our Canadian bus manufacturer in Quebec, our bus manufacturer in Winnipeg, our unemployed standing outside the gate looking in. Germany is building the troop carrier buses that carry our armed forces, all for the sake of less than \$5,000 per bus on half a million dollar buses. That is an appalling situation that ignores the best interests of Canadians.

Surely there should be some kind of a lens through which the procurement officers look when they make these purchases. Is this purchase in the best interests of Canadians? Is the best price always the best value? These are questions that need to be asked. It was the final recommendation of our report, to advise procurement officers, or perhaps recommend to the government that the officers be given more latitude to consider the whole cost and value of their purchases. In some cases the lowest cost is not always the best value, if there are quality issues at stake and if there are other maintenance costs.

In this example most of our troop carrier buses are Canadian made but 32 of them will be German made. We now need new tools. We need new training for the mechanics to maintain them. We needed Canadian military officers to fly back and forth to Germany to supervise the manufacture of them.

Whatever savings there might have been in this example were burnt up by all of the other additional costs. The best value would in fact have been either the Quebec buses or the Winnipeg buses. It certainly was not the German option.

These are some of the frustrations that came to our attention as committee members. We had compelling testimony from the wood furniture manufacturing industry. They are very strong actors in Quebec and in the province of Manitoba. We heard from the window and door manufacturers, the furniture manufacturers and the shipbuilding industry. It was not just the IT sector that was frustrated with the lack of access to government procurement.

● (1715)

One can imagine the amount of office furniture the Government of Canada buys. These are things Canada is known for. We have strength in these areas. These are areas of expertise. Canada is a centre of excellence in furniture building because we have access to the resources and we have a long history and tradition in this industry. Would it not make sense that when the Government of Canada needs to buy furniture, it would give some preference, within the limitations of our trade agreements, to Canadian manufacturers? That is not being protectionist. That is being a proud Canadian nationalist. That is what that is.

Routine Proceedings

We see the Americans doing it. We see the Americans going beyond that with their buy American program. We are not recommending that we match the buy American program with a buy Canadian program. Within the context and limitations of NAFTA, we are allowed to show preference for a Canadian product if it is within 7% of the price range. In my example of the buses, if we had availed ourselves of the opportunities that are already available to us, we would have had Canadian buses right then and there.

We had an interesting study, but we are not at all satisfied with the government response to our seventh report of the government operations committee. There is one thing that came up in the context of our debate and I will close with this recommendation. Small and medium size businesses indicated three areas that they were frustrated with: first, government procurement; second, their problem in finding venture capital; and third, the extraordinarily high federal tax rate on small businesses.

I would like to point out that in the socialist paradise of Manitoba, the business tax rate on small businesses is in fact zero. If the federal Conservative government were not strangling the growth potential of small businesses with its crippling small business tax, more Canadian small businesses might be able to fight through some of the other disadvantages, such as their inability to get government procurement.

I hope that my Conservative colleagues are listening to this plea. If they would stop persecuting small businesses with these crippling small business taxes, we may in fact be able to aspire to a burgeoning SME sector in this country. As I said, 80% of all the jobs created between 1993 and 2007 were in that sector. We should be doing all we can to encourage them.

I did have one more point that I would like to make. I was interested in the remarks of my colleague from Newfoundland. She was talking about the shipbuilding sector. We did have representation from the shipbuilding industry. There were some very interesting recommendations and quotations from the shipbuilding sector to which I think we would be well advised to pay attention. However, if I cannot find them in my notes, I can always talk about something else.

Let me deal with one of the other recommendations of the report and the government's response to it. We were disappointed that the government's response to the seventh report of the government operations committee was thin, almost to the point of being patronizing. I do not think it took our recommendations seriously. Let me give one example.

Recommendation number four is that the federal government must establish a system of fairness to encourage departments and agencies to use SMEs.

Disappointingly, the government reacted by saying it is essentially already doing all it can to encourage SMEs. Our recommendation was more along the American model, where the office of small and medium enterprises actually advocates on behalf of small businesses and helps them to ensure that they get a set-aside quota of all the government procurement contracts in that country.

That is the direction we want our Office of Small and Medium Enterprises to take. It is not just to provide information. We want them to take them by the hand, if necessary, guide them through the morass of RFPs and help them achieve a specific quota so that we can proudly say that we support SMEs, not stifle them.

• (1720)

[Translation]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to begin by congratulating my hon. colleague. He gave an excellent speech that was also very interesting. He broached the topic that I presented this afternoon from another angle, one that was not necessarily taken at committee. I find that rather strange. It is a more down to earth angle, the angle of consequences. I would like to congratulate him and say that I feel very privileged to work in committee with someone who has so much experience and who brings these kinds of ideas to the table.

Given that the committee members had asked for studies, a business case, before going any further in terms of a megaproject or megacontracts, I would like to ask him if he is at all concerned about the solicitation of interest and qualification that appeared this summer? What does he think of that? What does he think of the fact that even the terminology has changed, when the minister had just told us that we would never see professional services disappear from these huge contracts, as well as the fact that the term “professional services” has been changed to “managed services”, which means one might presume that they are simply avoiding the question? How does the member feel about all of that?

[English]

Mr. Pat Martin: Madam Speaker, I share my colleague's concern that the access is becoming more difficult in terms of being able to understand the proposal process. Frankly, many of the witnesses we heard from in the small and medium size business sector said it seems that just as they begin to learn the game, the rules change. Not only is it a difficult and complex process, but it is an ever evolving, ever changing process that makes it that much more difficult to take part in. It becomes a smaller and smaller elite group that has figured out the magic formula. It is like *Rumpelstiltskin* where one has to know the magic word in order to spin straw into gold.

The terminology changed, and my colleague referred to compounds, the degree of difficulty facing those wishing to avail themselves of these very lucrative and important contracts not only for the continuity of keeping the employees in these companies busy, but growing the companies to be able to hire more Canadians.

As I said, we heard overwhelming testimony. That is not my language; that is the language of the drafters of this report, the researchers, and the language was ratified unanimously by committee members. The committee heard overwhelming testimony that SMEs are frustrated with the federal procurement process, from cumbersome and expensive to complete RFP processes, to the government not paying interest on overdue accounts. Many SMEs have simply given up trying to bid on federal government contracts.

Private Members' Business

• (1725)

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's involvement in our committee. He brings forward a lot of good points, especially today when he is talking about cutting taxes. I hope the next time we bring forward a budget that cuts taxes he will divert from his usual practice of voting against and vote for that particular initiative.

However, I thank him for his interest in promoting the idea of lower taxes especially for small businesses as they are one of the major contributors to the Canadian economy. As a matter of fact, they employ many Canadians and they are absolutely the driver of the Canadian economy.

As it relates to a number of things that we heard in committee, I agree with him and I supported the wording, that people were concerned about and frustrated by the process.

I talked to a person who works in a department today. He is working to expand the standing offers for that particular department. It is moving from a case where over the last 20 years there has been a single supplier for a service, essentially a monopoly. The government is actively pursuing additional competitors to that particular contract so that we do not continue to have a single supplier.

I agree with the hon. member. The government responded to the concerns. We see this in action on a daily basis in every department, across departments. Specifically today, I heard of one where it is moving away from essentially a monopoly. I wonder if the hon. member thinks this is a good process.

Mr. Pat Martin: Madam Speaker, there certainly has been the widespread belief that some government contracts are structured and bundled in such a way so as to favour one obvious beneficiary and sometimes year after year.

I will use for an example the Royal LePage relocation contract, a multi-billion dollar contract to move military families and government personnel and take care of their real estate needs. It seems like a stacked deck. It is one of those ring toss games on a carnival midway where no one can win. Only the one who has the magic formula seems to get this contract and it is always Royal LePage.

If there is progress in that regard, I would be the first to celebrate it, but I think we have a long way to go. It is not a fair game yet.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Madam Speaker, the member for Winnipeg Centre does such a great job of representing Winnipeg.

I had the honour of sitting on that committee a few times and I heard some of the serious concerns that many of the small and medium sized enterprises and businesses across our great land had to deal with when dealing with the government.

One of the things that I have been actively involved with is the credit card issue. Small and medium sized businesses are being hammered with interchange fees that continue to drive their profits down. We seem to be stifling innovation because they do not have money now to spend on research or for hiring more people.

I can think of some great businesses in my great riding of Sudbury, such as Herold Supply and B & J Music. All of these businesses are—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I regret to interrupt the hon. member but I would like to give the member for Winnipeg Centre 30 seconds to respond. I will soon have to interrupt this debate for other business.

Mr. Pat Martin: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Sudbury for raising a critically important issue for small and medium sized businesses.

I should point out that my colleague from Sudbury has been the single, foremost champion on the issue of credit card reform and credit card fairness, exposing the atrocious gouging that takes place in today's marketplace associated with credit cards. It is not only the consumer who is being victimized but small businesses have been stuck with these interchange fees, user fees, et cetera and they are also victims.

We are glad we have champions like the member for Sudbury who is advocating on behalf of ordinary Canadians and small businesses like those he mentioned in his riding.

• (1730)

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): It is my duty to interrupt the proceedings on the motion at this time. Accordingly, debate on the motion is deferred until a future sitting.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

CRIMINAL CODE

The House resumed from November 5 consideration of the motion.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): It being 5:30 p.m. the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on Motion No. 388 under private members' business in the name of the hon. member for Kitchener—Conestoga.

Call in the members.

• (1755)

[Translation]

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

(Division No. 129)

YEAS

Members

Abbott
Aglukkaq
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Anders
André
Angus
Ashton
Bachand
Baird
Bélanger
Bevilacqua
Bigras
Blais
Block

Ablonczy
Albrecht
Ambrose
Anderson
Andrews
Ashfield
Atamanenko
Bains
Beaudin
Bellavance
Bezan
Blackburn
Blaney
Bonsant

Private Members' Business

Bouchard	Boucher
Boughen	Bourgeois
Braid	Brison
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Bruinooge	Brunelle
Byrne	Cadman
Calandra	Calkins
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)	Cannis
Cardin	Carrie
Casson	Charlton
Chong	Christopherson
Coderre	Comartin
Cotler	Crombie
Crowder	Cummins
Cuzner	Davidson
Davies (Vancouver East)	DeBellefeuille
Dechert	Del Mastro
Demers	Desnoyers
Devolin	Dewar
Dhaliwal	Dion
Dorion	Dosanjh
Dryden	Duceppe
Dufour	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Dykstra
Easter	Eyking
Faille	Fast
Finley	Flaherty
Fletcher	Folco
Foote	Galipeau
Gallant	Godin
Goldring	Goodale
Goodyear	Gourde
Gravelle	Guay
Guergis	Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)
Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord)	
Hall Findlay	
Harris (St. John's East)	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hawn	Hiebert
Hoback	Hoepfner
Holder	Hughes
Hyer	Jean
Jennings	Julian
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kennedy	Kent
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Laforest	Laframboise
Lake	Lauzon
Lavallée	Layton
Lebel	LeBlanc
Lee	Lemieux
Leslie	Lessard
Lobb	Lukowski
Lunney	MacKay (Central Nova)
Malhi	Malo
Maloway	Mark
Marston	Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Masse	Mathysen
Mayes	McCallum
McGuinty	McLeod
McTeague	Mendes
Menzies	Merrifield
Miller	Minna
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	
Mulcair	Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Murphy (Charlottetown)	Murray
Nadeau	Nicholson
O'Connor	O'Neill-Gordon
Ouellet	Paquette
Paradis	Patry
Pearson	Petit
Plamondon	Pomerleau
Preston	Proulx
Rae	Rafferty
Raitt	Rajotte
Rathgeber	Regan
Reid	Richards
Ritz	Rodriguez
Rota	Roy
Savage	Saxton
Scarpaleggia	Scheer
Schellenberger	Sgro

Shea	Shipley
Siksay	Silva
Simson	Smith
Sorenson	St-Cyr
Stoffer	Storseth
Strahl	Sweet
Szabo	Thi Lac
Thibeault	Thompson
Tilson	Toews
Tonks	Trost
Trudeau	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vellacott
Verner	Vincent
Volpe	Wallace
Warawa	Warkentin
Wasylcia-Leis	Watson
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	
Wong	Woodworth
Wrzesnewskyj	Yelich
Young	Zarac— 230

NAYS

PAIRED

Nil

Nil

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I declare the motion carried.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

The House resumed from November 16, consideration of the motion that Bill C-395, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (labour dispute), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

● (1805)

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

(Division No. 130)

YEAS

Members

André	Andrews
Angus	Ashton
Atamanenko	Bachand
Bains	Beaudin
Bélangier	Bellavance
Bevilacqua	Bigras
Blais	Bonsant
Bouchard	Bourgeois
Brison	Brunelle
Byrne	Cannis
Cardin	Charlton
Christopherson	Coderre
Comartin	Cotler
Crombie	Crowder
Cuzner	Davies (Vancouver East)
DeBellefeuille	Demers
Desnoyers	Dewar
Dhaliwal	Dion
Dorion	Dosanjh
Dryden	Duceppe
Dufour	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Easter
Eyking	Faille
Folco	Foote
Godin	Goodale
Gravelle	Guay

Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)
 Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord)
 Hall Findlay
 Hughes
 Jennings
 Kennedy
 Laframboise
 Layton
 Lee
 Lessard
 Malo
 Marston
 Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
 Masse
 McCallum
 McTeague
 Minna
 Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
 Murray
 Ouellet
 Patry
 Plamondon
 Proulx
 Rafferty
 Rodriguez
 Roy
 Scarpaleggia
 Siksay
 Simson
 Stoffer
 Thi Lac
 Tonks
 Vincent
 Wasylcia-Leis
 Zarac — 119

Harris (St. John's East)
 Hyer
 Julian
 Laforest
 Lavallée
 LeBlanc
 Leslie
 Malhi
 Maloway
 Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
 Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
 Mathysen
 McGuinty
 Mendes
 Mulcair
 Murphy (Charlottetown)
 Nadeau
 Paquette
 Pearson
 Pomerleau
 Rae
 Regan
 Rota
 Savage
 Sgro
 Silva
 St-Cyr
 Szabo
 Thibeault
 Trudeau
 Volpe
 Wrzesnewskyj

NAYS

Members

Abbott
 Aglukkaq
 Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
 Anders
 Arthur
 Baird
 Bezan
 Blaney
 Boucher
 Braid
 Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
 Cadman
 Calkins
 Carrie
 Chong
 Davidson
 Del Mastro
 Dykstra
 Finley
 Fletcher
 Gallant
 Goodyear
 Guergis
 Hawn
 Hoback
 Holder
 Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
 Kent
 Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
 Lauzon
 Lemieux
 Lukiwski
 MacKay (Central Nova)
 Mayes
 Menzies
 Miller
 Moore (Fundy Royal)
 O'Connor
 Paradis
 Preston
 Rajotte
 Reid
 Richardson
 Saxton

Ablonczy
 Albrecht
 Ambrose
 Anderson
 Ashfield
 Bernier
 Blackburn
 Block
 Boughen
 Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
 Bruinoooge
 Calandra
 Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
 Casson
 Cummins
 Dechert
 Devolin
 Fast
 Flaherty
 Galipeau
 Goldring
 Gourde
 Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
 Hiebert
 Hoepfner
 Jean
 Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
 Komarnicki
 Lake
 Lebel
 Lobb
 Lunney
 Mark
 McLeod
 Merrifield
 Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
 Nicholson
 O'Neill-Gordon
 Petit
 Raitt
 Rathgeber
 Richards
 Ritz
 Scheer

Private Members' Business

Schellenberger
 Shipley
 Sorenson
 Strahl
 Thompson
 Toews
 Van Kesteren
 Vellacott
 Wallace
 Warkentin
 Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)
 Weston (Saint John)
 Wong
 Yelich

Shea
 Smith
 Storseth
 Sweet
 Tilson
 Trost
 Van Loan
 Verner
 Warawa
 Watson

Woodworth
 Young— 114

PAIRED

Nil

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I declare the motion carried. Accordingly the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

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

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

* * *

[English]

HUNTINGDON PORT OF ENTRY

The House resumed from October 21 consideration of the motion.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure today to speak on an issue affecting my province of British Columbia.

Motion No. 391 states:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should direct the Canada Border Services Agency to change the name of the Huntingdon Port of Entry to "Abbotsford-Huntingdon Port of Entry".

I am pleased to announce that the Liberal Party of Canada will be standing shoulder to shoulder with the Abbotsford council, with the Abbotsford tourism agency, and with the chamber of commerce to support this initiative. We understand, that although Huntingdon is a community within Abbotsford, there has been some confusion with respect to this because it really is not on any map.

This will improve the ability of the community to maximize its tourism capabilities and reduce confusion for those who wish to travel to beautiful Abbotsford.

However, this belies the situation of the government's lack of support for and ignorance of multiple issues affecting my province of British Columbia.

Let us take a look at the HST for example. This will benefit some, to be sure, but it is going to hurt many. Why is the government not saying to the province of British Columbia that the \$1.6 billion incentive package that it proposed to give to the Government of British Columbia, that it just does not say to Premier Campbell, "You, sir, can have this until you can resolve this with the people of British Columbia to make sure that we minimize it for those people who are going to be hurt".

Private Members' Business

Yes, people are going to be hurt. Who is going to be hurt? Those who have modest means. How is this going to happen? It is going to increase a selective tax burden on those who have modest means.

This tax is going to apply not only to that which the PST applied to but that which the PST did not apply to. We are going to have a huge tax burden that will be on the shoulders of everyone for basic things: some medications, some foodstuffs, heating and services. When people go to get a service, whether they are making \$100,000 or they are making \$30,000, they will pay the same amount.

That is why this is going to hurt many people of modest means. The government cannot simply blightfully walk along and suggest for a moment that it simply will be "all is well" and it will benefit everyone. It will benefit some groups, but it is going to hurt a lot. It is going to hurt those groups which have the most modest means.

It will hurt huge sectors that in my province are extremely important: tourism, home building, restaurant services, even schools. Imagine, my province has estimated that it is going to cost the school boards of British Columbia an extra \$24 million a year in increased taxes. They do not have the money right now to pay for the basic needs of our students. They are scrimping and saving on programs that children need to be able to maximize their experience in schools.

Many critical programs, from music to the arts, have been cut because school boards do not have the money. We can imagine that this is going to be an extra \$24 million for the school boards in British Columbia, which will be chiselled out of the programs for our students. At the end of the day it will be our students in British Columbia who are going to be hurt.

Imagine if we wanted to buy a house. In my area in Victoria the average house price exceeds \$500,000—

•(1810)

Mr. Ed Fast: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. As you know, Mr. Speaker, one of the cardinal rules of the House is that when one of our members speaks to a bill that he actually speaks to the content of the bill and matters arising out of that bill.

All I am hearing from the member is a rant about the HST which has absolutely nothing to do with the border crossing in my city of Abbotsford. I would ask you to rule the member out of order.

The Deputy Speaker: I know the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca will want to address the main aspects of the motion before the House in his remarks, so I will turn the floor back to the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca.

Hon. Keith Martin: Mr. Speaker, this goes directly to the heart of the motion because the purpose of the motion is to improve economic development in Abbotsford.

Let us talk about Abbotsford and the fact that house prices there are also over half a million dollars. What will people do who want to buy a house in Abbotsford if the HST increases the cost of a house by 7%? In my area, the average cost of a home is more than half a million dollars. That is \$35,000 extra a year.

With respect to the border issues in Abbotsford, the purpose of the motion is a wise move to improve tourism in the area. One of the reasons people would pass through there is to capitalize on our sports fishing opportunities within British Columbia.

The government has introduced an initiative to identify the collapse of the sports fishing industry by calling for a judicial inquiry. This is a good thing. The problem, though, is there have been four inquiries in the last 20 years with respect to the collapse of our salmon stocks. I wonder what the people of Abbotsford will say to the people coming through the new border crossing about why the government has failed to implement the solutions that already exist to deal with the collapse of our salmon stock.

I will give one example. DFO has allowed commercial fishermen to take fish stocks as they come to the mouth of river before they can escape up the river. Therefore, fish stocks do not have the minimum numbers to go up the river to spawn. Commercial fishermen are vacuuming up the fish before the fish have a chance to return, destroying the ability of the fish to spawn and the ability of a particular stream or river to have an adequate return downstream later on. This is a very serious problem.

The other thing is that DFO, in terms of water rights, is not actually exercising its rights—

•(1815)

Mr. Ed Fast: Mr. Speaker, I am sure you have noticed that the member is insisting on dealing with issues that have absolutely nothing to do with Motion No. 391. The motion deals with the Huntingdon Port of Entry. Now the member is going on another divergence. He is talking about DFO. He is talking about fisheries. He is talking about the judicial inquiry. In fact, we do not even have a commercial or a sports fishing industry within Abbotsford itself. We have some sporting goods stores, but the sports fishery actually takes place further upstream, so he is way off base.

I would love to hear him address the specifics of this motion and talk about how important this border crossing is to the city of Abbotsford.

The Deputy Speaker: For the benefit of the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, I will re-read the motion:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should direct the Canada Border Services Agency to change the name of the Huntingdon Port of Entry to "Abbotsford-Huntingdon Port of Entry".

The hon. member has two minutes left. If he used the remainder of his time to address the substance of the motion, I think the House would appreciate it.

Hon. Keith Martin: Mr. Speaker, some of the folks who come through the border crossing actually do avail themselves of the sports fishing opportunities. That is why I am bringing it up. I am sure the member who represents the community would not want to mislead, in any way, people who come through the border crossing who want to engage in sports fishing and want to have the truth of the matter.

Cross-border travel through this site and also across our country, amounted to something in the order of \$75 billion. It is the lowest cross-border transfer that we have had in more than four decades. In fact, right now we have a huge tourism deficit and the government has done nothing to try to utilize our embassy and consulates in the U.S. to make an aggressive "Visit Canada" initiative to deal with this \$13 billion tourism deficit.

We want people to go through the crossing in Abbotsford. We want people to come to Canada from the United States, spend their money and enjoy the benefits, but the government is blithely unaware or disinterested in using its power, through our high commissions and consulates, and engage in an aggressive “Visit Canada” program. It should be doing that.

The government should also be convincing the American people, only 30% of whom have a passport, to get passports. Due to the American rules and regulations that have come forward, they need one to visit our country.

These are positive initiatives that the government should be taking upon itself and demonstrating some leadership. The failure to do so hurts our tourism businesses, hurts our restaurant services and hurts employment within Canada.

I have given the government some solutions. I sure hope it takes them on. It is my province and the people of British Columbia want to see this action and they want it done quickly.

• (1820)

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to Motion No. 391 in the name of the member of Parliament for Abbotsford. You have reminded the House of the motion already, but I am will read it again. It says:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should direct the Canada Border Services Agency to change the name of the Huntingdon Port of Entry to “Abbotsford-Huntingdon Port of Entry”.

I am pleased to say New Democrats also support this. The members of the B.C. caucus of the NDP, of which I am chair, appreciate the importance of this change to the community of Abbotsford. We are strongly supportive of the motion.

Fin Donnelly, the member elect for New Westminster—Coquitlam, has not been sworn in yet, so I think I can still say his name in the House. I am sure he is also on board with this change, which we know is important to the people of the Lower Mainland and Fraser Valley of British Columbia. We look forward to having him join us in the House so he can also be a strong spokesperson, like all new Democrats from British Columbia, for the interests of our province. I understand this will happen next week sometime, so we look forward to that.

The Huntingdon Port of Entry is one of four or five port-of-entry border crossings in the Lower Mainland and Fraser Valley. Huntingdon is one of the 24 hour border crossings. There is also the Douglas or Peace Arch crossing, which is between Surrey and Blaine, the Pacific Highway crossing, also between Surrey and Blaine, the Aldergrove crossing, which connects with Lynden, Washington and the Huntingdon crossing, which connects Huntingdon or Abbotsford and Sumas, Washington. There is also the crossing at Boundary Bay, which connects Tsawwassen and Point Roberts.

These are all very important to British Columbians. They are major access routes to the United States. A huge amount of traffic crosses each of these border crossings. We know they are very important to the local economies and the overall economy of Canada.

Private Members' Business

Abbotsford is the fifth largest city in British Columbia. As such, it plays a very important role in our province and is a very crucial part of British Columbia. We want to ensure Abbotsford has the advantages that should be brought to a border city.

We know border cities and border crossings are important to the local economies of those communities. They need to function well. They need to be clearly identified with the communities where they are located and the communities they serve.

We know that the amount of trade that crosses the Canada-U.S. border is extremely significant to all of us in the country. We know about the goods that travel back and forth every day. It is a crucial lifeline of our economy and of the U.S. economy. We also know the tourist trade that goes back and forth across the border is essential to our communities and a major industry in our province of British Columbia.

We also know the friendly traffic back and forth to visit family, friends and relatives is very crucial to all the communities along the border. It is crucial to most Canadians who live within proximity of the border to be able to use one of the land crossings between Canada and the United States.

We need to ensure that people are clearly aware of where these border crossings are located. There probably was a time in British Columbia when people knew Huntingdon as a border community. I think that has changed as Abbotsford has grown as a city. As Huntingdon has become part of the city of Abbotsford, I think most people now probably do not know of the community of Huntingdon. That is probably a failure of ours to appreciate our history, but it is still an important neighbourhood and community within the city of Abbotsford.

Most British Columbians would know of Abbotsford. Therefore, it is important this border crossing be identified with that city so people know exactly where this port of entry between Canada and the United States is located and can plan accordingly when they seek to use it. Businesses also need to know, as easily as possible, where this border crossing is located.

It is very important that it be linked by name to the largest community of which it is a part. This would be very helpful in ensuring that this remains an important border crossing between Canada and the United States.

• (1825)

I am glad the member has chosen, in consultation with the city council and chamber of commerce and tourism officials in the city of Abbotsford, to keep the reference to Huntingdon in the title so it would become the Abbotsford-Huntingdon Port of Entry. That historical connection has some value and still has meaning to many people. It is a good idea to include it.

The member has been asked about the cost of making this kind of change. A cost will obviously be involved, but I do not think it should necessarily be the determining factor. There will be changes to stationary, signage, all those kinds of things.

Private Members' Business

I hope if this change goes forward, which I think it should, that attention is paid to the change in signage. I hope we do not fall into the same trap that the Conservative government has fallen into with the signage around Canada's economic action plan. A huge amount of money has been spent on signs announcing the locations of where the government is spending its money.

We have heard that these signs were made in the state of Washington. Taxpayer dollars have flowed to a company in Washington state to produce these signs. It is an outrageous situation. Canada is supporting a buy American program when that work and those jobs should have gone to Canadians. I hope when the changes are made to the name of the port of entry to Abbotsford-Huntingdon, the work involved to change those signs is done by Canadians, in Canada, even in British Columbia where that kind of job should go. Maybe it should even go to Abbotsford rather than south of the border to a community in Washington state.

I hope the member will follow that issue closely because all British Columbians are concerned about the decision to take government spending south of the border. I hope he insists that the work be done in British Columbia, certainly within Canada.

New Democrats from British Columbia and the New Democrat caucus as a whole will be supporting the motion. It is a little strange that we needed to have this debate in the House of Commons. It could have easily been done by the government. All it would have taken was the stroke of a pen by the minister. It does not require legislation. It does not require a motion in the House of Commons. It could have been very easily accomplished.

The member could have said to the Minister of Public Safety that he thought it was a good idea and he could have asked him to sign off on it. He could have shown the minister the community support he has received for the idea. That could have left this time open in the House of Commons to discuss other issues of importance to our communities.

I am not saying this is not an important issue to the community of Abbotsford, but this could have been done by now. It could have been signed, sealed and delivered and under way a long time ago. A government member should be able to have that kind of influence with a member of cabinet. We could have seen that change already for the Abbotsford-Huntingdon Port of Entry.

I hope the government will proceed without delay. I hope the Minister of Public Safety has his pen warmed up to get this done as soon as we have the vote on the motion. I would not even mind in this case if the minister pre-empted the House of Commons. The importance of the motion is pretty clear. He clearly has the power in the regulations under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act to do that.

This is an important change for our border crossings in the Lower Mainland and the Fraser Valley of British Columbia. We appreciate the importance to the community of Abbotsford. We appreciate the importance of our border crossings. There is a lot more the government could do to ensure our border crossings worked effectively and efficiently. There are many issues relating to border crossing and the traffic that goes across it that need our attention. There are many issues relating to the security of that border,

particularly the issue of the importation of handguns into Canada. It is a border issue for our communities and certainly on the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. We appreciate the need for increased measures to ensure that the flow of handguns in particular across the Canada-U.S. border is addressed.

As I said, the NDP supports this change and hope that it goes forward.

● (1830)

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate. There being no members rising, I will go to the member for Abbotsford for his five minute right of reply.

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to close debate on my private member's motion, Motion No. 391. The motion directs the Canada Border Services Agency to amend the name of the Huntingdon border crossing to Abbotsford-Huntingdon port of entry. I want to thank my colleagues across the floor for supporting it, the member for Burnaby—Douglas and the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca. Despite some of the partisan jabs, they know this is the right thing to do.

Quite frankly, this is about community building and that is why the motion is so important to my community. As we have grown and as our economy has grown, the business leaders and key stakeholders in Abbotsford have identified the Huntingdon Port of Entry to be one of the key factors in our future prosperity.

Our neighbour to the south, the U.S., is still far and away Canada's largest trading partner representing between 75% and 80% of our total international trade. Failure to capitalize on such an opportunity would be a big mistake.

We have only one border crossing in our city but it is a very busy one. In fact, it is the 12th busiest in Canada in terms of value and 17th in terms of traffic volume according to the British Columbia Trucking Association. Approximately 180,000 trucks cross that border every year contributing millions to our local economy.

This border crossing is also a key point of entry for those visiting Abbotsford and, just as important, for those travelling through Abbotsford to other parts of our great province and our great country. Each one of those travellers represents an economic opportunity for our city and our region. That is why the visibility and profile of the Abbotsford port of entry needs to be enhanced.

Those wishing to travel and do business in the Pacific northwest need to know about the opportunities that our city has to offer and the ease with which many travellers can access other parts of our province. Having a border crossing that is more easily identified with its host community can only help in providing the improved profile that we seek.

Adjournment Proceedings

The motion is simple. It simply instructs the Canada Border Services Agency to add the name Abbotsford to Huntingdon Port of Entry. I ask members to please note that we are not replacing the name Huntingdon but rather including Abbotsford in the name. By doing so, we would not only improve the profile and identity of Canada's 12th busiest border crossing, but we would also preserve the name of a community which, along with the national railroads, played an important role in the early settlement and development of the Fraser Valley.

Adding the name Abbotsford to the name of our border crossing would have one added benefit. For years the residents of this region of B.C. were confounded by the number of different municipalities that comprised the larger trading area. Whether it was the village of Sumas, the district of Abbotsford or the district of Matsqui, it was often difficult to identify in which municipality one was present at any given time. Compounding the confusion were the many vibrant neighbourhood communities thriving in our area: Clearbrook, Mount Lehman, Bradner, Peardonville, Clayburn Village, Matsqui Village, Sumas, Barrowtown and, yes, Huntingdon. Many of these smaller communities still exist and thrive today.

Much of this confusion, however, was resolved in 1995 when the residents of our area voted to amalgamate the districts of Abbotsford and Matsqui under one name, Abbotsford. Since then, our identity has become much stronger without in any way diminishing the vital role that the smaller communities within our city play in nourishing our social fabric.

The Huntingdon Port of Entry remains as perhaps the last outstanding challenge in consolidating Abbotsford's identity and branding. The motion before us would address that challenge. I look forward to receiving the support of my colleagues in the House for the motion.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

An hon. member: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

In my opinion the yeas have it. I declare the motion carried.

(Motion agreed to)

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

● (1835)

[*Translation*]

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to denounce interference by the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities in a municipal conflict.

On June 5, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities did not answer the question I asked: “Why does the minister refuse to listen to the public transit experts?”

On December 10, 2008, the OC Transpo union, the Amalgamated Transit Union, here in Ottawa, called a strike. Control of scheduling hours was at issue. Both parties wanted to manage the scheduling, which was being done by drivers. To make a long story short, the parties went to arbitration.

At the risk of derailing the arbitration process, the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities did indirectly what he did not wish to do directly: he submitted an amendment to the Commercial Vehicle Driver Hours of Service Regulations. This amendment withdraws the exemption that applies to public transit systems of three cities—Gatineau, Windsor and Ottawa. All three systems carry passengers across borders and are under federal jurisdiction, whereas other public transit systems within the province fall under provincial jurisdiction.

The regulations govern the maximum driving and on-duty times and establish the minimum off-duty times of commercial truck and bus drivers. The regulatory impact analysis statement that the government was required to provide says a lot about its intentions.

On the one hand, the government admits that it does not possess any scheduling data for the Windsor and Ottawa transit services, but on the other hand, it is determined to regulate.

Here is what the Windsor transit service said when consulted:

—it does not believe that safety has been compromised under its existing structure for work-rest scheduling. Windsor believes that conforming to the...Regulations would require that it hire additional full-time staff to meet service needs and conform to the Regulations. Furthermore, the administrative requirements necessary for tracking hours of service would require additional staff as Windsor is currently operating at capacity.

And here is what the Ottawa transit authority had to say:

—while it does not plan to exceed the on-duty hours, doing so occasionally happens. The transit system advised that it needs flexibility in its scheduling to deal with special events.

Although the City of Ottawa did provide some information, it “could provide little information that directly links transit driver fatigue to collisions.”

It is obvious that the minister ordered quick action to satisfy his municipal pals.

Now, let us look at the regulations from the standpoint of benefits and costs. We can read that several comments were received which indicated that there would almost certainly be costs associated with adoption of these regulations, which is contrary to the millions of dollars in financial benefits cited by the City of Ottawa.

Adjournment Proceedings

Even after receiving these comments, the minister still decided to go ahead with his regulations.

I call that determination. You consult but you keep your ears closed. You do not listen to the comments from the main cities involved. What good is consulting if a decision has already been made?

[English]

Mr. Brian Jean (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have the opportunity today to answer the member's question.

First, I would like to say that we will not interfere, of course, in provincial or municipal jurisdictions because we get along very well with our partners. We are, in fact, doing things for Canadians and listening to them. The minister is listening to Canadians, though the member suggested that is not the case.

I want to talk about some of the biggest investments we have made in some 60 years as a country and as a federal government. Canadians are interested in these particular investments because they deal with so many Canadians. In particular, there are \$33 million for the extension of the Sheppard LRT. We are working with our provincial and municipal counterparts in the city of Toronto on that. It goes through three or four Liberal ridings, including Don Valley East, Scarborough—Agincourt, and Scarborough—Rouge River.

Let us look at some of the other investments that Canadians are really interested in. In particular, there are investments in GO Transit, some \$250 million, which of course will benefit all the people within the GTA. Canadians are interested in that. Another investment made by this Conservative government in more Liberal ridings is to ensure that there is equity for all Canadians and all Canadians are treated fairly.

There are \$622 million for the Toronto York-Spadina subway extension, which goes through the ridings of the members for York Centre and York West. There are some really good investments and I know Canadians are interested in this.

We are going through a global economic recession and some difficult times in this country, but with this Conservative government's lead, along with the Prime Minister's initiatives and those of the Minister of Finance, we are actually taking concrete steps to protect Canadian jobs and families, and ensuring they continue to have a high quality of life.

I do not think most Canadians recognize that within the first seven months of this year, and that is correct, Mr. Speaker, I see the astonishment on your face, we have invested more in Canada's infrastructure than the previous Liberal government did in seven years.

By working with our partners in the provinces, territories and municipalities, we are actually able to leverage two-thirds more funding. That is because we get along with our partners in the provinces, territories and municipalities. They are investing with us across Canada to protect Canadian families and jobs. This means we will be able to go three times as far with the money, obtain three

times the results, and create three times the number of jobs. That is because we are taking the initiative as a Conservative government.

Since the introduction of our economic action plan, our government has actually committed over \$7.5 billion, which, when leveraged with other levels of government, our partners with whom we have great working relationships, will amount to over \$22 billion to more than 5,000 infrastructure projects nationwide.

That is great news for Canadians, Canadian jobs, and it is great news for our quality of life. We will continue to have the best in the world.

● (1840)

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Mr. Speaker, during the consultations, the City of Windsor indicated that complying with the regulations would cost \$1 million per year and force it to hire at least 15 drivers.

During the sham consultations, the Canadian Urban Transit Association expressed concern that the Conservative government would impose these changes on provincial and territorial authorities. In fact, according to the *Canada Gazette*,

On behalf of its 120 members, the Association requested that the Government refrain from doing so because of their safety record, the need for more research, and the existence of other safety legislation.

Will the government consult and, more importantly, will it listen to the 120 association members before forcing this decision on everyone?

[English]

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, I am very glad the member brought up the city of Windsor. The city and people of Windsor are very happy because this government has taken the initiative to invest more in the city of Windsor than any government, I believe, in this country's history. In fact, more money is invested in Windsor to create jobs and ensure there is a great border crossing there than any other place in Canada. That is great news.

However, do not take my word for it. The Canadian Construction Association said:

We are starting to see a lot of competition for infrastructure projects...Many of our members say they are very busy and it will be one of the busiest seasons on record.

In fact, John Beck, the president and CEO of construction giant Aecon, said, "I've been in this business for 45 years. I've never seen as strong a pipeline of work as we see today".

It is very clear that our government is protecting Canadian jobs and families, and getting the job done.

● (1845)

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak again to the issues with respect to the lighthouses and the de-staffing of the lighthouses not just in Random—Burin—St. George's but in all of Newfoundland and Labrador and in British Columbia.

Adjournment Proceedings

Lighthouses have existed for hundreds of years and have provided exceptional service to mariners. It does not matter what industry we are talking about, whether it is the fishing industry, the trade industry, the tourism industry or the offshore industry, lighthouses are very important to those who make a living from the sea. It is important that they continue to be staffed by individuals who are familiar with what happens on the ocean. These individuals know all too well how dangerous the sea can be. Any suggestion to de-staff these lighthouses has been met with great consternation, certainly in my riding, where 8 of the 23 lighthouses that are staffed in Newfoundland and Labrador are located. People are very concerned about the suggestion that there should only be automated lighthouses. Tragedies will occur. They ask that the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans continue to allow lighthouses to be staffed.

I know the minister has put on hold her idea to de-staff the lighthouses pending a review of the situation and looking at the extra services that are provided by lighthouse keepers. I asked the minister, as part of this review, to include a consultation process so that those who would be affected by any decision to remove lighthouse keepers would be consulted and could have a say in her final decision. Certainly the lighthouse keepers and those involved in the other industries want to be heard.

I do not know where the minister is on this path in terms of a timeframe. We are very anxious to hear how far the review has progressed and whether or not she intends to consult with lighthouse keepers as well as those who benefit from having lighthouse keepers at all of the lighthouses.

I want to talk about the benefits of having lighthouse keepers, of having lighthouses that are staffed. People who are not familiar with lighthouses or who have no involvement with them probably would not recognize the benefits. I would like to let them know of some of the things that lighthouse keepers do.

According to a report by the Canadian Coast Guard, there were 400 instances of marine incident detection and assistance direct to marine interest and to official government agencies. There were 3,000 on-site weather and sea state reports through the atmospheric environment service. There were 40,000 on-site weather, sea and ice reports directly to mariners. There were 2,500 ice and iceberg reports to government agencies. In Newfoundland and Labrador, there were 300 marine mammal reports to Memorial University in Newfoundland. There were 500 on-site weather reports to helicopter operators. There was information and guidance to 74,000 out-of-province visitors and information and guidance to 70,000 local visitors.

Mr. Randy Kamp (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Newfoundland and Labrador for her interest in this topic. On this side we certainly agree with her that lighthouses in Canada and abroad have been and continue to be an important symbol of our rich history and are necessary for the protection of all mariners.

It is true, though, that over the decades the nature of the work traditionally done by lightkeepers has changed considerably. In the past lightkeepers played a very key role in maintaining the lights, hence the name, and ensuring the operation of our aids to navigation system. Mariners have relied and continue to rely on that system.

The important work of lightkeepers was certainly integral to the safety of every mariner here in Canada and in fact all around the world. We appreciate and respect their contribution.

However, the reality is that with today's proven technology, the same aids to navigation service is being delivered just as safely through increased reliance on technology. These changes in technology, such as the use of solar power and accurate marine charts, real-time radio communications and the use of a differential global positioning system, have been happening all over the world and provide mariners with a far more effective and reliable aid to navigation service.

In these days of electronic charts and precise marine navigation, the fact is that having lightkeepers present on automated aids to navigation sites is not the best way to provide the necessary aids to navigation services to mariners.

Automated de-staffed light stations have been in operation successfully in Canada for more than a decade throughout the maritime provinces, on the Great Lakes, in Quebec and all throughout the world, even in the most difficult terrain such as Alaska and Norway, without affecting marine safety. Every developed country in the world has de-staffed their automated light stations.

It is important to note that in Canada, over the years, some lightkeepers have taken on the provision of services, in addition to their regular function of keeping the lights, and that mariners and aviators have grown accustomed to these additional services.

In fact, some stakeholders have reported that services, such as being the ears and eyes of the federal government on the coast for safety, security and environmental purposes, providing weather and sea state information, for example, wind speed and direction, ice conditions, wave heights, cloud types and sea lanes, etc., for mariners and aviators are important to them. We understand that.

For this reason on September 30, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans asked the Canadian Coast Guard to undertake a further review of those additional services provided by lightkeepers in British Columbia and in Newfoundland and Labrador. In advance of that review, no light station will be de-staffed.

The Canadian Coast Guard is now defining the terms of that review, but let me assure members that it will include the proper consultations with lightkeepers and stakeholders to ensure that the true essence of those additional services provided and their importance to Canada are adequately captured.

If, following that review, it is determined that a staffed presence is the only way to ensure the delivery of those additional services, then this option will receive full consideration.

In closing, de-staffing of automated light stations can be done and has been done in every other developed nation in the world, most importantly, without affecting marine safety. Over the years, mariners and aviators have become accustomed to receiving additional services from lightkeepers, and I think it is important that those services be reviewed before we proceed any further on this file. Our government is committed to doing so.

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•(1850)

Ms. Judy Foote: Mr. Speaker, I was a little concerned when my colleague first started to respond to my issue, because he tended to talk about the fact that we really did not require staffed lighthouses to carry out the responsibilities that were normally carried out by lightkeepers.

I am relieved, somewhat, to hear that the review is in fact under way, that the Canadian Coast Guard has been instructed, as of September 30, to look at the situation.

Contrary to what my colleague said, I think it is important to recognize that we should not be looking at everything through the one lens. For instance, if we speak to the captain of a ferry that runs between Newfoundland and Labrador and Saint-Pierre and Miquelon, a little bit of Europe off the coast of North America, he will tell us that in the area between Saint-Pierre and Miquelon and Newfoundland and Labrador, the winds vary there so much that while he can look around him in Fortune and find out what the situation is and he can call ahead to Saint-Pierre and Miquelon and get a reading there, he really does need to have the eyes and ears of the men who are staffing that lighthouse at Green Island, which is located at midpoint.

He has told me time and time again that if he did not have access to those individuals, it would be very irresponsible—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. parliamentary secretary.

•(1855)

Mr. Randy Kamp: Mr. Speaker, I do thank my colleague for that additional clarification. I know information like that will be taken into consideration by the Coast Guard and the minister as she reviews their results.

However, let me assure all members of this House that the Canadian Coast Guard is not walking away from its obligation to provide a safe and efficient aids to navigation system to Canadians. The safety of mariners remains the Canadian Coast Guard's top priority.

The fact is that the Coast Guard is working to fully employ the benefits of technological improvements that other countries have been benefiting from for decades now. Given current technology, the safety of mariners in many places in Canada does not require lightkeepers at automated light stations.

Again as the minister has stated, the process that we are going through will allow the reviews of relevant stakeholders to be heard and considered, so I would urge all members of this House to let the announced review unfold in its due course.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last October 19, in this House during question period, I asked a question concerning how taxpayers' money got into the coffers of a company that Senator Housakos had on his payroll at the time the contract was given out.

The answer that I received from the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities was clearly unsatisfactory, so I would like to put some facts before this House.

Senator Housakos, before he was a senator and even after he was named as a senator, was on the payroll of a Montreal engineering firm, BPR, when it won a \$1.4 million contract to study the Champlain Bridge.

The same day the port authority for the Champlain Bridge opened bidding on the contract, May 20, Senator Housakos was a member of the organizing committee for a major Conservative fundraiser in Montreal, and lo and behold, four executives from BPR, the firm that he was serving with, was employed with, was on the payroll for, as well as two government officials from the agency awarding the contract, were also present at this fundraiser, and lo and behold, this violated the code of ethics of that agency.

Mr. Housakos' declaration to the Senate ethics officer on February 4 indicated that he worked for BPR. On October 1, over four months after the bidding was opened on the contract, after the fundraiser for which he was one of the organizers, Senator Housakos sent a notice to the Senate ethics officer indicating that he was no longer working for that company. It was previously indicated on his website that he was a vice-president of BPR. This reference, however, was removed on October 15, after he was questioned by the media.

In addition, there have been allegations made in the public arena by serious people, including the leader of the Action démocratique du Québec, that there were problems with the finances of that party. Mr. Housakos was the chief fundraiser for that party.

On November 13, Liberals asked questions again, and this is part of the questions that we have asked in public, not just in this House.

[*Translation*]

Liberals are asking the Prime Minister if he was aware of allegations concerning Conservative Senator Leo Housakos' techniques for financing the Action démocratique du Québec, a provincial party, if the Senator uses the same methods in his role as fundraiser for the Conservative Party, and whether the Mr. Harper approves of his senator's actions.

The Privy Council always investigates before a senator is appointed, and the RCMP is responsible for part of the investigation. Members of Parliament asked the government to table the report on the investigation concerning Senator Housakos that was carried out before he was appointed to the other place.

Once again—and I see that the parliamentary secretary is here—I would ask the government to table the report on the investigation concerning Senator Housakos that was carried out before the Prime Minister appointed him to the Senate.

•(1900)

[*English*]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to be here to answer these questions. However, I have to say that once again the Liberals are doing what they normally do and that is to try to create a scandal where no scandal exists.

Senator Housakos has asked the Senate ethics officer for a complete investigation of this matter. That in itself, I think, speaks volumes about the innocence of Senator Housakos on any of these charges made by the member opposite.

I always find it very amusing whenever a Liberal, particularly from Quebec, rises and asks a question about financial wrongdoing and scandal. We all know, and every Canadian knows, that the biggest financial scandal in Canada's parliamentary history was the sponsorship scandal.

We have seen documented evidence through Justice Gomery's commission of the theft of taxpayer dollars that ended up in Liberal riding association bank accounts. That is well documented.

Of course, we again hear the caterwauling from the side opposite because, whenever we talk about the sponsorship scandal, it is like touching a raw nerve of the members opposite.

I would also point out to my hon. colleague that at the parliamentary ethics committee, my colleague, the member for Peterborough, has brought forward a motion to ask the Auditor General for a complete investigation of the more than \$40 million still missing that Justice Gomery was prevented from investigating because of the terms of reference of his commission.

I would suggest that any Liberal member from Quebec should welcome such an inquiry, because there are doubt and aspersions cast on every single Liberal member from Quebec, which is where Canadians may believe that some of that missing \$40 million could have ended up, in those Liberal riding association bank accounts to finance elections.

Rather than trying to fight this initiative and deny the Auditor General going forward and launching a full-scale investigation into the missing \$40 million, one would think that Quebec Liberal MPs would welcome this to try to prove their own innocence and demonstrate that their reputations are above reproach.

However, we do not hear this; we do not hear this at all. All we hear from the members opposite is deny, deny, deny and their attempt to try to pretend that they were the victims of this massive parliamentary scam, this massive scandal, that outraged Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

However, what we do hear, any time there is any opportunity for a Liberal to try to accuse the government or government members of some impropriety, is them doing so. However, let me say once and for all, they always do so and it is without any substance.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Mr. Speaker, given that the member opposite has raised the issue of the sponsorship program and the public judicial inquiry headed by Justice Gomery, I would like to

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point out that the inquiry was put into place by a Liberal government. It was a Liberal government that appointed Justice Gomery and allowed Justice Gomery to write his own mandate.

Moreover, it is the Toronto Port Authority that is begging this Conservative government to allow the Auditor General to audit its operations because of doctored board minutes at a time when the Minister of Natural Resources of the Conservative government sat on the board, and to audit her authorization of her own expenses, where she signed off on her own expenses. The government is refusing to give the Auditor General an exemption to allow her to do an audit of the Toronto Port Authority at its request, whereas when the Auditor General pointed out to the Liberal government that she was unable to audit VIA Rail, because it was an arm's length corporation, the Liberal government gave her that exemption and allowed her to audit VIA.

Therefore, I would suggest that that member should—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I merely point out to the hon. member, of course, that when it comes to the Auditor General, the Liberal colleagues on the ethics committee are trying to prevent this motion asking the Auditor General to find the \$40 million in stolen money that is still missing. Liberal members of that committee, including the chair, are trying to prevent that from happening. No matter how we slice and dice this, it is clear that the Liberal Party is still under a cloud of suspicion, until such time as that \$40 million of stolen taxpayer money is recovered, or is at least found.

Every member of the Liberal Party who has a riding association in Quebec is under suspicion, and I would suggest that the member opposite should take the bit in her teeth and ask the Auditor General. As the members opposite are so proud to point out, the Auditor General was asked by the Liberal Party to investigate the sponsorship scandal, and now they should go the final step and ask the Auditor General to try to do another full scale investigation of the missing \$40 million.

● (1905)

The Deputy Speaker: The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:05 p.m.)

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