



CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 145 • NUMBER 019 • 3rd SESSION • 40th PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Monday, March 29, 2010

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, March 29, 2010

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1105)

[*English*]

SUPREME COURT ACT

The House resumed from March 19 consideration of the motion that Bill C-232, An Act to amend the Supreme Court Act (understanding the official languages), be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House to speak to Bill C-232, An Act to amend the Supreme Court Act (understanding the official languages). The bill would create a requirement that all individuals appointed to the Supreme Court of Canada be able to understand the proceedings before them in both English and French without the aid of an interpreter.

Our government is committed to promoting the use of both official languages in Canadian society. Canada's bilingual nature is a fundamental aspect of our national identity. As Canadians, we pride ourselves in our country's bilingual institutions. This is particularly the case with respect to the Supreme Court of Canada, which plays a fundamental role in our democratic society as the ultimate guardian of the values enshrined in the Canadian Bill of Rights and Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The Supreme Court's mission statement, as set out in its public website, is to serve Canadians by leading the development of common and civil law through its decisions on questions of public importance. In the context of this mission, the court has declared its commitment to the rule of law, independence and impartiality, and accessibility to justice.

There is no doubt that the judges of our Supreme Court faithfully pursue these important goals on a daily basis. Indeed, the court consistently provides all Canadians with the highest quality of justice they expect and deserve.

Hon. members are well aware that the Supreme Court of Canada is recognized nationally and internationally as a model of collegiality,

professionalism and superior capacity. Canadians may take tremendous pride in the stature that our judges hold around the world.

In light of the important role of the Supreme Court, as the pinnacle of our justice system, the government's overriding consideration in the appointment of judges to the court is, and must continue to be, merit based on legal excellence and personal suitability. Bilingualism remains an important factor in the assessment of candidates considered among other factors, including proficiency in the law, judgment, honesty, integrity, fairness, work habits and social awareness.

The composition of the court, including a number of judges, is established by the Supreme Court Act, which provides that at least three of the justices must come from Quebec. As a matter of long-standing practice, the composition of the Supreme Court of Canada has reflected regional representation with the remaining judges appointed from Ontario, Atlantic Canada, the Prairies and British Columbia.

The practice of ensuring regional representation guarantees that the most qualified and deserving candidates across the country are appointed to the Supreme Court of Canada. Bill C-232 proposes to circumvent this exemption, which would in fact hinder regional representation to the court.

We must draw a distinction between institutional bilingualism and individual bilingualism. Institutional bilingualism is a fundamental and historic component of the government's responsibilities in ensuring that both official language communities can be served in either English or French. Individual bilingualism, which is improperly advocated by Bill C-232 as a requirement, would undermine that component.

Currently, the Supreme Court, as an institution, provides services of the highest quality in both official languages. The proposed amendment would make bilingualism a pre-condition to appointment. Given the extraordinary complexity and the importance of the cases heard by the court, this would require the highest level of linguistic capacity necessary for understanding the most refined and difficult judicial arguments, based on extensive factual evidence in both official languages.

There are subtleties of language that many of our best legal minds across Canada may not have fully mastered, and the stakes are high. Our most important rights hang in the balance. It is the government's position that the proposed amendment is not necessary to ensure access to the court in either official language.

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The court provides all its services and communications in English and French. In addition, every individual who appears before the court is free to use either English or French in written and oral proceedings. The court's decisions are issued in English and French, thereby also contributing to a growing case of bilingual case law that is accessible to all Canadians and others worldwide.

The goal of ensuring the rights of Canadians to be heard and understood in the language of their choice is already being fully met by the court. The current composition requirements of the Supreme Court Act, together with the historical practice of regional representation, allow us to preserve our important commitment to legal pluralism, while at the same time ensuring that Canadians are served by judges of the highest distinction and ability. It has provided Canadians with a strong and independent judiciary that is the envy of free and democratic governments throughout the world.

The effect of Bill C-232 would be to have linguistic considerations override the central consideration of merit by reducing the pool of otherwise highly qualified candidates in some regions of the country where there may be fewer lawyers and judges capable of hearing a case in both official languages. We recognize that there must be sufficient linguistic capacity in our courts to provide equal access to justice in both English and French. The government has been and will remain vigilant in seeking competence in both official languages to achieve this goal.

Thus, bilingualism will remain an important criterion in the process of selecting judges to Canada's Supreme Court. However, such a factor should not eclipse the overruling consideration of merit and legal excellence in maintaining and nurturing the fairest justice system in the world.

• (1110)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not think it will surprise anyone to hear that I will support this bill, but I want to say it to avoid any confusion. I support this bill, and I encourage all my colleagues in the official opposition and those in other parties to do the same. I will use my time to try to explain as openly as possible why I support this bill.

I hope we can all agree that our society is not static; we live in a society and a world that is constantly evolving. Everything changes. We hope that it is for the better. Pressure leads to change, and we always hope that it improves the situation. So it is not surprising that our laws reflect this desire to improve our society and to improve the lives of our fellow citizens.

Today we are looking at the results of enacting of Canada's Official Languages Act in 1969, over 40 years ago. In those 40 years, the application of this legislation has continuously evolved, so much so that no one now opposes the notion that Canada has two official languages, French and English. That just shows how our society and our federation are always evolving.

In 1988, the Conservative government at the time, led by the right hon. Brian Mulroney, supported by the official opposition at the time, even made two amendments to this act. Furthermore, in 2005, another amendment was made by the Liberal government of the day, supported by the official opposition, which was led by the current

Prime Minister of Canada. This shows that on both sides of the House, whether it is a Liberal government with a Conservative opposition, or a Conservative government with a Liberal opposition, we all seem to agree on the nature of this linguistic duality and its evolving nature.

The adoption of a charter of rights and freedoms within a constitutional framework and of amending formulas in 1985 is another example of this. It was quite a dramatic change, and it had been discussed for several decades in this country. I later had the opportunity and the honour, as a member, of sitting on a special committee that was formed to bring about a bilateral constitutional amendment between Quebec and Canada that changed the nature of the school boards in Quebec. With this amendment, the denominational school boards became English and French boards. This is yet another example of the changing nature of our society, its legislative framework and our institutions.

I can give other examples. New Brunswick declared itself officially bilingual when the official languages legislation was passed. It was the only province to do so. That was another occasion. Since then, Ontario, Nova Scotia, Manitoba and Saskatchewan have all passed legislation, made regulations and adopted policies to give effect to Canada's linguistic duality.

Each of these occasions was marked by a strong determination to better reflect Canada's reality and ensure that all Canadians can be served in both languages, as well as the desire to learn together. There have also been changes at the municipal level. Moncton has declared itself an officially bilingual city. These are examples.

I now come to this bill.

• (1115)

I congratulate my colleague from Acadie—Bathurst on his bill and the work he has done in this area. This bill is in keeping with the changing nature of our federation and its institutions.

When the National Assembly of Quebec began debating this bill, the party leaders—Mr. Charest, Mr. Dumont and Ms. Marois—had their say. The vote was unanimous; everyone was in favour of such an initiative. They saw that it made sense.

Our two solitudes sometimes need to come together and learn to get to know each other. Sometimes they unite, but above all they have to get along. I am going to give some other telling examples that concern all the members of the House.

In order to reflect the will of the people, the party leaders have learned both official languages. Some of my colleagues, those on either side of the House—government or opposition, I make no distinction—may hope to become ministers. People who are learning French or English in the House know that anyone who wants to become prime minister, must be able to address constituents in both of our country's official languages.

People who preside in the House must also learn the other official language. It shows respect, good will and recognition towards the two official languages. Those in charge of our institutions, such as Canada's Parliament, the political parties and the Supreme Court, must also speak both languages and be able to understand their fellow citizens, no matter which of our official languages they use. It is the same for the upper house.

Things are moving in the right direction. Bilingualism is part of our country's identity and my colleague's bill is part of this evolution.

I am not disagreeing with the Conservatives' argument that Supreme Court judges must be chosen based on their legal skills and good judgment. I believe that one of those skills is the ability to understand the language in which a person is presenting to them, be it French or English, our two official languages. It is logical to ask that the nine Supreme Court judges be able to understand both languages.

During the debate in Quebec, the party leaders I mentioned also recognized the fact that the judges from Quebec should speak both languages too.

I encourage all parties in the House to support my colleague's bill, which is fully in line with our country's evolution.

● (1120)

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am also very pleased to rise here today to speak to Bill C-232 introduced by my NDP colleague.

I am especially pleased to do so because I firmly believe that everyone, whether they speak French or English, has the right to be heard by someone who understands them. Of course, Mr. Speaker, you understand me, but if I am not lucky enough to have an interpreter who gives an excellent translation, you will not understand me.

Sometimes certain differences in terms of culture or language might not be properly understood. There are certain nuances in the language spoken by a particular group of people or nation that cannot necessarily be translated, regardless of the quality of the translation.

That is only one of the main reasons the Bloc Québécois and I personally believe strongly in this bill. Indeed, everyone is entitled to a full and complete defence. Everyone is entitled to be heard and understood by the Supreme Court judges who must rule on these matters. They are asked to make very important decisions and examine very serious issues. If they cannot read the files in their original language, they may not be able to understand the essence of the issue, not because of a lack of intelligence, but rather because of a lack familiarity with the culture associated with the other language.

When a judge cannot read newspapers or listen to the news in French, and cannot hear a conversation in French and understand the essence of it, how can that judge rule on potentially disturbing facts and on important decisions that may become part of case law?

I would like to give an example. Last week, from March 13 to 20, we were in Buenos Aires, Argentina. That week, a big story in Canadian papers, especially in Quebec papers—because there was a time when Quebec was a very religious nation, a nation of believers

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—was the scandal in Rome concerning pedophile priests. Apparently, the Pope had trouble removing pedophile priests from their functions.

When I arrived in Buenos Aires, this was the top story on television and everyone was talking about it. It got constant airtime all day long. That is because people in Buenos Aires, Argentina, are still very religious. The news was of tremendous importance to them. However, in the United States, Canada and Quebec, other stories were on the front page. In the United States, the top story was the health care bill that Barack Obama was trying to get through the Senate and the House so that all Americans could have access to health care. Here, Afghanistan and the documents we were supposed to get from the government but had not yet received were still making headlines. We have received some documents since then, but they are so heavily whited out that they are unreadable.

Clearly, one nation's realities are not the same as another's. To understand these realities, the people who legislate and who decide what goes into a Supreme Court report or ruling must be able to understand not just the words, but the overall context. The people who do that have to be bilingual at the very least. The Commissioner of Official Languages was absolutely right. He dismissed claims made by the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, who was elected by a francophone majority and then had the gall to act against its wishes and, as a member of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, decide that English was the most important language for judges to speak.

● (1125)

I do not understand why that hon. member thinks an anglophone judge is better qualified and more knowledgeable than a bilingual francophone judge.

What is more, most francophone judges and lawyers speak English as well. We very rarely see a bilingual anglophone judge. Most anglophone judges have not bothered to learn French. But when someone wants to rise to such a high position, a position where they represent the people and make the important decisions, they should at least make the effort to learn both official languages of the country they represent. It is an indispensable condition.

It is hard to believe there could be a Supreme Court justice who does not understand French, who is unable to read and understand rulings that have been made and who has to rely on translations. Even though these texts are translated well and convey the meaning, basically, they do not explain motivations.

As the Liberal member was saying earlier, Quebec has decided to replace the religious school boards with linguistic school boards. I do not know if that has been done elsewhere, but the nation of Quebec has made the necessary decisions. Even if this is not being done elsewhere, the Supreme Court of Canada has to make decisions that reflect all of Canada, Quebec and the Atlantic provinces.

My honourable NDP colleague has mounted a strong defence of the Francophone cause. However, we must ensure that measures are in place to protect the rights of French-language communities—those inside as well as outside Quebec—in 10, 15 or 20 years. Every day, senseless decisions are made.

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For example, the Vancouver Olympic Games showed that it is difficult to ensure respect for the French language. Not long ago, the citizens of Burnaby, British Columbia, received a brochure that was printed in five languages, but not in French. This was highlighted in our press review this morning. And yet, Francophones make up a fairly large segment of British Columbia's population. Why continue to deny it?

The City of Ottawa is bilingual. However, the mayor does not speak French; he cannot speak to citizens in French. When Ms. Harel wanted to run for mayor of Montreal, she was accused of not speaking English; she was never told that she speaks impeccable French. And yet, that is the case. It was not the English press, but the French press that objected to the fact that she did not speak English. We are quite concerned about the Anglophone minority. However, this should be the case for the Francophone community.

True concern for the Francophone community does not mean talking out of both sides of one's mouth. The Conservatives are very good at that, as demonstrated by their advertising campaign. One day, they will have to face the facts: the Francophones of Quebec and Canada will no longer be pushed around. We will not put up with it. We have rights and we will ensure that those rights are respected.

• (1130)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since March 20 was the 40th anniversary of the International Day of La Francophonie, I am happy and very proud to have the opportunity to speak about why the members of the House of Commons should support Bill C-232.

The bill proposes that any judge appointed to the Supreme Court of Canada must be able to speak to the people in both official languages.

A number of organizations support this bill, which would ensure that statements made by someone addressing a Supreme Court judge are understood without the need for interpretation.

Canada's laws must be written in English and French so that judges and lawyers understand them well and the latter can better represent their clients.

The Supreme Court of Canada itself, citing a decision made in Ontario, recognized that Canadians should have the right to be served in the official language of their choice.

There are many francophones in my riding of Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing in northern Ontario. It is up to all members in this House to tell the communities they represent that the government takes bilingualism seriously.

Any document tabled in the House of Commons must be tabled in both official languages. Every member has the right to speak in either of the two languages. It is just as important for this requirement to apply to the Supreme Court of Canada.

It is unbelievable that legislation requires the Federal Court, the Federal Court of Appeal and the Tax Court of Canada to offer bilingual services, but not the Supreme Court.

I completely agree with my colleague from Acadie—Bathurst on this bill.

My constituents want bilingualism to be a requirement for judges of the Supreme Court of Canada.

My riding extends from Timmins to Sudbury to Thunder Bay, an area with a vibrant francophone community. In Hearst, for example, 99.9% of the people are francophone. Most of them are originally from Quebec.

Last year, one of the mayors wrote a letter to the government requesting that any judge appointed to replace a unilingual anglophone judge be bilingual so that citizens would be properly represented.

The Minister of Justice sent the following answer:

Dear Madam:

Thank you for your letter, in which you added your concerns about the appointment of a bilingual judge to the Superior Court of Justice in Cochrane, Ontario—at the time—to those raised by elected officials from the City of Hearst.

I would emphasize that the Government of Canada recognizes the importance of supporting the development of minority language communities.

• (1135)

On the one hand, he recognized that these communities have a need, but on the other, he said that it is not necessary to recognize the needs of francophones when it comes to the Supreme Court of Canada.

Furthermore, I can assure you that this government is determined to ensure that our courts function as well as possible. One way to do that is to make sure that they can hear cases in both official languages.

He recognized that a need existed, but later on in the letter, he said that he would make sure people were receiving proper services. The government may have some influence, but ultimately, he is the one making decisions about who to appoint to the Supreme Court of Canada. Clearly, the government is not yet committed when it comes to official languages.

I worked for Probation and Parole Services for about 13 years. People who have to appear before a judge and want a French-language trial are often at a disadvantage compared to others because they have to wait until a French-speaking judge is available. Wait times in the courts are getting longer and longer. We want this kind of bill to pass so that nobody will have to wait any longer than anyone else for their trial.

I have encountered some problems with translation. Even though someone is interpreting the trial of the person who wants to be judged in French, it is not the same thing. During one of my elections someone needed a short sentence to be translated. The English sentence was: "Please post in window".

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It was translated as, “S’il vous plaît, poteau dans la vitre”. “Post” was treated as a noun instead of a verb, and the sentence became “Please stake into the window”! That is why it is not enough to say that translators are available. Even here in the government when documents are translated, we always have to double-check because not all translators have the same skills. That is why it is very important that a justice of the Supreme Court of Canada, who is going to hear the cases, is truly able to grasp the intention and meaning of the legislation. That is not really possible if one is unilingual.

As I was saying, I support this bill. I want to read a few comments made by certain judges and lawyers on their support for this bill. Graham Fraser said:

So when someone comes forward and says, or says about a candidate, that he is very competent, that he has all of this experience, but he doesn't have the ability to hear a case that's presented before the Supreme Court in the language in which that case is presented, then he is missing a critical competence. He is actually not as competent as a candidate for the Supreme Court who does have that ability.

Michel Doucet, a lawyer, said:

In my opinion, in a Canadian setting, with the legislation that we have and with our interpretation of bilingual legislation, to be competent to sit as a justice of the Supreme Court one must understand both languages.

I could read many more quotes like that, but more and more people support the fact that we need legislation to protect bilingualism in the Supreme Court of Canada. Its judges will understand both official languages. Lawyers and judges, and those aspiring to those professions, will realize they have to learn French to better serve the Canadian public.

Again, I support this bill introduced by the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst.

[English]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak to Bill C-232, introduced by my colleague, the member for Acadie—Bathurst.

I was expecting this bill would be passed unanimously in Parliament. I read through the past debates in *Hansard* and was surprised to find that members of the Conservative Party were very reluctant to proceed, especially when they should be open-minded enough on principle to vote in favour of the bill at second reading and get the bill to committee. If they had any concerns or amendments, they could present them at committee and we could proceed from there.

I believe the Liberals are onside on this bill. The Bloc certainly indicated support. The NDP caucus is solidly onside. I also read with interest the speeches of other members of our caucus, the member for Outremont and the member for Burnaby—New Westminster. I would like to echo their sentiments on this bill.

The bill puts in a new requirement for judges of the Supreme Court to understand English and French without the assistance of an interpreter. That is all it does. That should not be difficult. When appointing judges at that level, we are dealing with extremely competent, qualified people who have considerable education and can understand concepts. Language training should not be a problem for people at that level.

Once again, I am a bit taken aback that Conservative members would present the view that they have.

My wife speaks Spanish and French. Members of her family have sent their children to French immersion schools in Manitoba for the last number of years. As other members have indicated, there is no shortage of French immersion schools in Manitoba. As a matter of fact, the number of people who go to French immersion is rising. That part of the school system is expanding and people are interested in sending their kids to French immersion schools.

My home province of Manitoba has had difficulties over the years. In terms of the province itself, I get questions about Manitoba politics. I was involved provincially for a number of years. There was an issue back in the 1970s which had its roots in 1890 when Manitoba passed the Official Languages Act, which rendered the province unilingual. In 1975 a unilingual parking ticket was issued to Georges Forest. That case and the Bilodeau cases targeted the 1890 Official Languages Act and they won. The province had to deal with the issue.

Rather than translate 100 years of old statutes, the NDP government of the day, of which I was a part, after negotiations with Société franco-manitobaine and the federal government, arrived at an agreement for a constitutional amendment which would have led to the expansion of French language services in Manitoba. We had an agreement. Société franco-manitobaine was in favour of all the new services that it wanted. The provincial government was in favour. The federal government was in favour.

Everything was proceeding as it should, but it was the Conservative opposition of the day that decided to make hay on the issue. It led to acrimony in the legislature, bell ringing, a virtual shutdown of the legislature and a virtual destruction of the government. The government at the end of the day backed down and said it would translate the laws, and that is what happened. What we did not want to happen, to spend millions and millions of dollars to translate 100-year-old laws, happened.

● (1140)

Having said all that, since that time French language services have expanded in Manitoba, so we translated the laws and now we have very good services. As a matter of fact our current premier, Greg Selinger, who is bilingual, who speaks French, has been personally in charge of French language services for the last 10 years, ever since he was the finance minister in 1999 when Gary Doer formed the government. I know he has attended francophonie conferences. He is very active on that file. I have certainly heard him in caucus enough on the issue. I think if we checked, we would find that French language services have expanded in Manitoba under the NDP, under Mr. Selinger, to the extent that there has not been a complaint, a story or any acrimony over the last 10 years. No one has complained that they are not able to get services in the French language.

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Our solution at the end of the day has all worked out favourably, while it certainly caused a lot of political problems in the province, caused us to have a bad reputation across the country for a while partly because of some misunderstandings. I do not think there is or should be a role for parties to say one thing at one level in one place and then the opposite on the campaign trail, an election situation or another venue. That is what happened in Manitoba. The opposition basically took an issue and twisted it and tried to make political hay out of the situation.

At the end of the day, guess what? The opposition was successful in causing the government to back down, but the government was re-elected anyway. So the proof is in the pudding, and the proof is that playing angles that should not be played in issues like language, because they can be divisive, does not necessarily get the results we think we should be getting in the long run.

I thought I would deal with that issue because I read *Hansard* on this issue. Also, I do want to correct an error I might have made at the beginning of my speech when I indicated the Conservatives should support the bill at second reading. My whip, and the author of the bill, points out that we are at third reading right now. Having said that, my intention is still to encourage the Conservatives to come on side. We do have the majority now with all three parties supporting the bill. It makes sense to me that members opposite join the coalition, as they put it, to make this a unanimous bill rather than trying to find ways to slow it down and thwart what is essentially an excellent idea from the member. The member has already gone through a lot with the bill, given that the Prime Minister prorogued the House a few months ago and then we had to start over again when we just spoke on the bill a few months ago.

I am very pleased to have my time on the bill and I know the member wants to make his closing arguments.

• (1145)

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to thank the members who stood up here in the House to support the bill—the member for Madawaska—Restigouche, the member for Gatineau, the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan, the member for Ottawa—Vanier, the member for Laval, the member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking and the member for Elmwood—Transcona—as well as all the members who support Bill C-232.

It is important to understand that Bill C-232 does not say that Supreme Court judges must understand French, but that they must understand English and French.

We are not trying to say that anglophone judges appointed to the Supreme Court have to understand French so that francophone judges do not have to learn English. We want the judges to actually speak both languages.

My argument has never changed, and I disagree with the Conservative government's position that it may be difficult to find qualified judges. That is what the Conservatives are saying.

However, the ability to hear a case in both official languages is a skill. Opponents of the bill have often raised the point that highly qualified judges might be overlooked because they do not under-

stand both official languages. That makes no sense. Given that the laws of this country have been written in both official languages without being translated, the ability to understand both versions of the law without translation is an important legal skill.

• (1150)

[English]

Mr. Graham Fraser, the Commissioner of Official Languages, said this:

So when someone comes forward and says, or says about a candidate, that he is very competent, that he has all of this experience, but he doesn't have the ability to hear a case that's presented before the Supreme Court in the language in which that case is presented, then he is missing a critical competence.

That is what the Commissioner of Official Languages said. He was appointed by the Conservative Party. I hope it trusts Mr. Graham Fraser. The Conservative Party has appointed Mr. Graham Fraser as Commissioner of Official Languages, and the Commissioner of Official Languages said that.

Then he said that the candidate is missing the critical competence:

He is actually not as competent as a candidate for the Supreme Court who does have that ability.

That is from the Commissioner of Official Languages.

The National Assembly in Quebec has expressed that it is in favour of the Supreme Court being bilingual, being able to understand the two languages. By saying that, it is the two groups that represent the two people who have founded this country, the anglophone and the francophone both being able to understand both languages.

A lawyer who was a teacher from the University of Moncton went to the Supreme Court. He was talking about Mr. St-Coeur and the translator was interpreting the name as "Mr. Five O'clock". When we have a case like that, we have a problem.

The lawyer, Mr. Doucet, went to the Supreme Court about seven times. He added:

In the week after I had argued a case before the Supreme Court, I had an opportunity to hear the English version of my arguments on CPAC.... The translation did not allow me to understand my own words.

There is a problem then. The Supreme Court of Canada is there to show our country, to show by example. I think it is time to do this.

Just last week I had to raise a question in the House of Commons about appointments of two judges to the appeal court in Nova Scotia being bilingual, because the last time they replaced two bilingual judges with unilingual judges.

That is what I am putting to this House. I hope we have the support of all the members. Then that will become the past and when judges are appointed to the Supreme Court, they will represent what actually happens in our country, the two official languages of our country.

I think this would be the honourable thing to do. I hope I have the support of all of the members.

Government Orders

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The time allocated for debate has expired. Accordingly, the question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): In my opinion the yeas have it.

And more than five members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Pursuant to Standing Order 98, a recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, March 31, 2010, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

•(1155)

[English]

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): We will now suspend until 12:04 p.m. when we will return with government orders.

(The sitting of the House was suspended at 11:55 a.m.)

SITTING RESUMED

(The House resumed at 12:04 p.m.)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

•(1200)

[English]

CANADA-JORDAN FREE TRADE ACT

Hon. Rob Nicholson (for the Minister of International Trade) moved that Bill C-8, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the Agreement on the Environment between Canada and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the Agreement on Labour Cooperation between Canada and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise in the House to debate Bill C-8 at second reading. The quicker we can get this free trade agreement through the House, the quicker we can get it to committee and back to the House for third reading. This is

excellent legislation that would benefit all Canadians and certainly all Jordanians.

These agreements are the latest examples of our government's strategy to open doors for Canadian businesses and investors in these challenging economic times. This agreement will be the Canada-Jordan free trade agreement and related agreements on labour cooperation and the environment.

An aggressive free trade agenda will foster economic growth, encourage competition and provide more choice for Canadians, and it was highlighted in both the Speech from the Throne and budget 2010. As the global economy continues to recover, the one thing that is clear is that free trade, not protectionism, is the key to long-term prosperity for Canadian workers.

Expanding our market access and engaging in free trade partnerships rather than protectionism is part of the government's strategy to help create jobs, growth and opportunity for Canadians from coast to coast. In particular, this free trade agreement would benefit a number of sectors across Canada's economy.

Today I would like to outline a few of these sectors and talk about why our trade relationship with Jordan is so critical at this time in our history.

The fact is that sectors across Canada's economy need the kind of competitive access provided by this free trade agreement. Our companies need to be able to compete and succeed in a global marketplace. The agreement would immediately eliminate tariffs on the vast majority of current Canadian exports to Jordan. To be more precise, the agreement would eliminate all non-agricultural tariffs and the vast majority of agricultural tariffs on our two-way trade.

Farmers would benefit because the agreement would eliminate tariffs on pulse crops, including lentils, chickpeas and beans, frozen french fries, animal feed and various prepared foods. It would also expand opportunities for Canadians in other sectors, including forest products, industrial and electrical machinery, construction equipment and auto parts.

As I am sure the House is aware, our manufacturers and Canadians employed in all of these sectors need every competitive advantage they can get in these challenging times. Through tariff elimination, our free trade agreement with Jordan would open new doors for these sectors, create new opportunities for Canadians employed in them and help our businesses succeed in global markets. The free trade agreement would help to ensure a level playing field for Canadian exporters, vis-à-vis competitors who currently benefit from preferential access to Jordan's markets.

I want to take a moment to also touch on the Canada-Jordan foreign investment promotion and protection agreement that came into force on December 14 of last year. Signed at the same time as the free trade agreement, it will help encourage two-way investment by providing investors in both countries with the clarity and the certainty they need when investing in each other's markets.

Government Orders

Canadian investors are discovering a wealth of opportunities in the Jordanian market. Sectors, like resource extraction, nuclear energy, telecommunications, transportation and infrastructure, all hold much promise for Canadian investors. One need only look at the great success the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan has found in Jordan. It is now the largest foreign investor in Jordan. We can all also look at the long list of other Canadian companies, like Bombardier and SNC-Lavalin for instance, that have made significant inroads in the Jordanian market.

That is why the free trade agreement and the foreign investment promotion and protection agreement are such important accomplishments. We are standing up for Canadian business and we are standing strong for Canadian workers. In the broader sense, it is only the beginning.

The Canada-Jordan FTA is Canada's first ever free trade agreement with an Arab country. The Middle East and the north Africa region are becoming more important to Canadian business.

• (1205)

This agreement with Jordan would give us access to a critical market in the region. We have opened a number of significant doorways into the region and set the stage for Canadian businesses to create even more commercial links throughout the Middle East and north Africa in the years ahead.

However, Canada also believes that deeper commercial engagement need not come at the expense of labour standards or the environment. We think trade and investment can be a positive force for communities worldwide. We are very pleased to include parallel labour and environment agreements as part of the larger package of agreements we have signed with Jordan.

I will start with the labour co-operation agreement. It commits both countries to respect the core labour standards set out by the International Labour Organization, standards that help eliminate child labour, forced labour and workplace discrimination, and that respect freedom of association and the right to bargain collectively. The agreement also commits both countries in providing acceptable minimum employment standards and compensation for occupational injuries and illnesses. I should also add that under this agreement migrant workers would enjoy the same legal protections as nationals, when it comes to working conditions.

In a similar vein, the agreement on the environment commits both countries to pursue high levels of environmental protection and the development and improvement of policies that protect the natural environment. Domestic environmental laws must be respected and enforced. This agreement commits both countries to this goal.

It also commits both countries to ensure that the strong environmental assessment processes are in place, as well as remedies for violating environmental laws. Through the agreement on the environment, our governments are also encouraging businesses to adopt best practices of corporate social responsibility and promote public awareness and engagement. As with the labour agreement, these measures would help ensure that increased trade and investment does not come at the expense of the environment and that businesses can play a positive role in the life of each country.

This is a critical time for Canada's economy. The global economic downturn has hit all nations hard. Our bilateral trade with Jordan, for example, fell from \$92 million in 2008 to \$82 million in 2009, primarily due to a decline in Canadian exports to Jordan.

We must do the right things to get there. We must continue to take steps to sharpen Canada's competitive edge. The global economy is not going away and one in five Canadian jobs depend upon Canada trading with the rest of the world. We need to continue opening doors to opportunity for our businesses and investors to thrive and prosper today and beyond the current economic downturn. Our free trade agreement with Jordan is an important part of these efforts. So is the foreign investment protection agreement and the two agreements on labour and the environment. Canada needs these tools to be competitive in Jordan.

This free trade agreement resonates with many Canadians. It would eliminate tariffs on Canadian products into this expanding market. In doing so, it would create opportunities for Canadian industries still on the rebound from recent economic turbulence and complement the government's successful strategy to stimulate economic growth for Canadians on all fronts. It would benefit Canadian consumers by eliminating tariffs on virtually all imports from Jordan. In doing all of that, and this is the key, it would also protect the environment and workers' rights.

I cannot mention this fact enough. This is not just a free trade agreement. It has a side agreement on labour co-operation and the environment. They were negotiated in parallel with the free trade agreement and link directly to environmental and labour provisions. Both the environment and the labour agreements contain what the negotiators call a non-derogation clause, meaning that neither Canada nor Jordan may waive or lessen existing environmental and labour laws to encourage trade or investment.

In effect, the parallel labour and environment agreements would help to ensure progress on labour rights and environment protection.

I will begin by elaborating on the agreement on the environment that is included in this agreement.

This agreement commits both countries to pursue high levels of environmental protection and to continue to strive to develop and improve their environmental laws and policies.

Government Orders

•(1210)

Canada and Jordan are committed to complying with and effectively enforcing their domestic environmental laws, ensure that proceedings are available to remedy violations of environmental laws, promote public awareness of environmental laws and policies, put in place environmental impact assessment processes, and encourage the use of voluntary best practices of corporate social responsibility by enterprises.

The agreement on the environment also creates potential avenues for cooperation. Areas of activities would include cooperation on enforcement and compliance, corporate social responsibility and environmental technologies.

The agreement's dispute settlement provisions are forward-looking and progressive.

Members of the public would be able to submit questions to either party on any obligations or cooperative activities under the agreement. Canada and Jordan can undertake consultations to resolve any disagreements and, if need be, the matter can be referred to ministers for resolution.

As a final step, both Jordan and Canada would be able to ask for an independent review panel to investigate situations where they think the other party has failed to effectively enforce its environmental laws. In these circumstances, Canada and Jordan will work to develop an action plan to implement panel recommendations.

Environmental and labour protections are integral to the Canada-Jordan free trade agreement. We all know that the environmental and labour standards can go together and even benefit from free trade. Our free trade agreement with Jordan, along with the parallel agreements on the environment and labour cooperation, ensures that they do.

Finally, in summarizing this agreement, I just want to go over a couple more points.

We know that Canada and Jordan would eliminate all non-agricultural tariffs and most agricultural tariffs and have both committed to reducing non-tariff barriers to trade. Canadian exporters would benefit from enhanced access to the Jordanian market. A Canada-Jordan free trade agreement would also help to level the playing field, vis-à-vis competitors who currently benefit from preferential access against our companies here in Canada.

Under tariff elimination, there would be an elimination of all Jordanian non-agricultural tariffs that currently average 11%. These include tariffs of 10% to 30% on many non-agricultural products of Canadian export interests, including industrial and electrical machinery, auto parts, construction equipment and forest products such as wood building materials and paper. The elimination of the vast majority of Jordan's agricultural tariffs, including key Canadian export interests, such as pulse crops, frozen french fries, various prepared foods and animal feeds, which face high tariffs of as much as 30%.

The vast majority of current Canadian exports to Jordan would benefit from the immediate duty-free access to the Jordanian market upon implementation of this free trade agreement. Upon implementation, Canada will immediately eliminate all non-agricultural tariffs

on imports originating in Jordan, as well as most agricultural tariffs. As in all of our past free trade agreements, Canada has excluded over-quota supply managed dairy, poultry and ag products from any tariff reductions.

There are also reductions to non-tariff barriers to trade in this agreement, commitments to ensure non-discriminatory treatment of imported goods, provisions to affirm and build on obligations under the WTO Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade, and an agreement to apply the provisions of the WTO agreement on the application of sanitary and phytosanitary measures in bilateral trade.

A committee on trade in goods and rules of origin would be created as a forum for Canada and Jordan to discuss any goods-related trade issues that arise, including technical barriers to trade.

There would be a bilateral goods trade overview. Canadian exports to Jordan totalled \$65.8 million in 2009, up from \$31 million in 2003. Our top exports to Jordan in 2009 included vehicles, forest products, machinery, pulse crops, such as lentils and chick peas, ships and boats and plastics. The top exports for the previous year included paper and paperboard, copper wire, pulse crops, machinery and wood pulp. Canadian merchandise imports from Jordan totalled \$16.6 million in 2009, up from \$6 million in 2003. Top imports included knit and woven apparel, precious stones and metals, mainly jewellery, vegetables and inorganic chemicals.

•(1215)

All our consultations and reviews of this very important agreement show us that trade will not just be expanded, but will be drastically expanded. It comes at a time when we need jobs and opportunities for Canadian workers. A couple of parties seem to totally reject the free trade agreement. They would take us back to the Great Depression again and work us through all kinds of technical trade barriers that Canadians simply cannot afford.

Finally, in the spirit of co-operation, I think there are a number of free traders in the House, certainly in the Liberal Party. They have been favourable to free trade agreements in the past. I would ask them to look at this agreement and to support it. We cannot afford to close doors on Canadian traders. We cannot afford to close doors on Canadian exporters.

A very good example is my own riding, a very rural riding on the southwestern coast of Nova Scotia. Ninety-seven per cent of all the jobs created in my very small, very rural riding are trade related and manufacturing jobs, whether they are fish processing jobs or manufacturing, it is all value-added. There is an aeronautical sector and an aerospace sector. In the forest products everything is dimensional lumber. It is all manufactured again. Agriculture is all value-added.

Government Orders

If those people cannot sell their products, if they cannot move on to the world market that we have traditionally enjoyed in Atlantic Canada, especially in Nova Scotia, through the days of the schooner trade and before that, then we are taking not only a step backward, we would be taking a step backward to ancient history, where people lived in walled city states and fought one another instead of trading with one another. That would be a tremendous mistake.

• (1220)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to see the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade admit his new friendships with the Liberal Party, and particularly with the hon. member for Kings—Hants.

After receiving the assurance that the Liberal Party would support the free trade agreement with Colombia, he mentioned that two parties were not supporting the agreement with Jordan. The Bloc agrees in principle with this free trade agreement. However, there is a specific issue that I find very disturbing, and I would like to get an answer from the parliamentary secretary in this regard.

My concern has to do with water. We are saying that, despite the fact that natural surface and ground water in liquid, gaseous or solid state, is excluded from the agreement by the enabling statute, this exclusion is not spelled out in the agreement itself.

What assurances can the parliamentary secretary give us that Quebec's water will not be exported under this new free trade agreement?

[*English*]

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Mr. Speaker, perhaps I may have misspoke. I do not believe I said anything about two parties not supporting this trade agreement in my comments. I would hope all parties would support the trade agreement. It is a good agreement, a progressive agreement and it will benefit constituents right across the country from coast to coast to coast.

In respect to the surface water, Canada does not trade in surface water. We never have. It has never been on the bargaining table, and it is not on the bargaining table now.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we will get beyond the rhetoric of the parliamentary secretary because we have time during the debate today to talk about what the real impacts have been of the government's misguided trade policy.

Certainly the 2,000 people in my riding who have lost their jobs as a result of the softwood sellout can attest to the fact that government members, at the very best, are trade dilettantes and, at the very worst, are very destructive to our manufacturing capacity and our value-added industries.

This bill was brought forward in September. The NDP at that time clearly signalled that it wanted it to go to committee so labour activists could be brought in to talk about the labour rights component and have human rights activists brought in to talk about some of the concerns that had been raised.

Thank goodness Jordan is not Colombia. Colombia is an appalling state that has abuses and murders occur routinely. The NDP has been

signalling that we wanted to send the bill to committee for eight months and the government, in its incompetence, has not brought it forward. Why has the government not brought it forward so we could send it to committee and hear from witnesses?

• (1225)

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Mr. Speaker, a very quick answer to his question is that is exactly what we are doing. The bill is before the House and it will go through second reading. There is a process and we all respect the rules of the House. I am sure even the hon. member respects the rules of the House. It will go through second reading, it will go to committee and the committee will look at it very closely.

There are not many questions on this legislation but the issue about it is quite simple. If we compare Canada's business with Jordan, we do somewhere between mid-\$60 million, low \$70 million worth of trade with Jordan this year, which is down from an all-time high in 2008.

If we look at the free trade agreement the United States signed with Jordan, it did about \$200 million worth of trade with Jordan. Now it does \$2 billion. We should expect the same type of exponential gain from Canada's business with Jordan as the Americans had.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary has not answered the question. Eight months ago all four parties signalled they wanted to send it to committee. Instead, the government has been pushing forward with the extremely controversial Colombia trade deal, where very clearly there is no consensus in the House, and systematically refusing to bring forward the Jordan bill, even though it was signalled.

The Bloc member for Sherbrooke signalled that he wanted it to go to committee. He wants to hear from labour activists and human rights advocates. We certainly want to hear from labour activists, human rights advocates and women's rights groups. We want the trade committee to delve deeply into the Jordan trade and see whether the components actually match the government's rhetoric. Yet the government has refused to bring it forward. It simply begs this question. Why has the government waited eight months?

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Mr. Speaker, I will try to speak more slowly and distinctly because my first answer was obviously missed by the hon. member. It will be the same answer.

It is in the House and we are debating it. There is a side agreement on labour and a side agreement on the environment. They are good side agreements. We are anxious to get this to committee and we would appreciate the support of the hon. member to get it to committee and back to the House so we get the agreement passed.

At the same time, we intend to continue, with the co-operation of the House, to work on a very important free trade agreement with Colombia. It really has nothing to do with the debate today, but is one that is an extremely important agreement to Canadian businesses, exporters and, therefore, workers.

I would again ask the hon. member to look through his rhetoric and support that agreement as well. All free trade agreements are good for Canadian workers.

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cardin: Mr. Speaker, I understand what the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster is saying. When we were dealing with the free trade agreement with Colombia, we spent several months looking at this agreement, at its ins and outs, and at the impact that it could have.

However, the members of the Standing Committee on International Trade did not have the opportunity to examine the agreement with Jordan. The free trade agreement with Colombia was signed before the committee had even issued its recommendations. When these recommendations became public, it was clear that Canada should not enter into that agreement.

In the case of Jordan, the work was not done either before the signing of the agreement. Committee members found out about it after the fact. They did not have the opportunity to examine this agreement. We are now at second reading, which is an important stage, but the committee has not done any real work. The parliamentary secretary is asking us to sign a blank cheque and to refer the bill back to the committee for review. The committee could well make recommendations against this agreement.

Here is the process that should be followed: the legislation goes through second reading and is then referred to committee. In some cases, particularly when we are dealing with free trade agreements, it would be preferable to know the impacts of such agreements before signing them.

• (1230)

[*English*]

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Mr. Speaker, again, I appreciate the question from the hon. member. The answer is very clear. When we get through second reading debate, the bill will go to committee. I look forward to his comments and interventions at committee. I look forward to any assistance the hon. member and his party are willing to give to move the bill through the chamber, through committee and back to the House so we can actually put it into law.

Again, we have over-debated the Colombia agreement and we are still debating it, but I think there is a different spirit of co-operation on the Colombian bill. I certainly hope we will be able to move forward in a positive way on Colombia as well.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today with great interest in and certainly initial support for this legislation, the free trade agreement that Canada has signed with the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, to go to committee where we can hear from witnesses and scrutinize the legislation as we ought to with any legislation.

This FTA ought to provide Canadian businesses and entrepreneurs greater access to the Jordanian market by eliminating tariffs on most of Canada's exports to Jordan. This includes tariffs on Canadian manufacturing and forest products, and in certain cases Canadian agriculture and agri-food. Once again, our supply managed sectors have been protected in this agreement.

In terms of the numbers, last year Canada and Jordan traded over \$82 million worth of merchandise. Almost \$66 million of that, or 80% of the trade, was in the form of Canadian exports to Jordan. It is a fairly small number. Certainly, the precedent set by the U.S.-Jordan

free trade agreement is encouraging. It increased ten-fold over a relatively short period of time so we would hope that could occur here.

While I spoke in general support of sending this to committee, I have to question more broadly the Conservative government's trade focus. With China and India growing between 6% to 9% per year, massive markets, incredible investments in infrastructure, water, sewage treatment, public transit, and green investments, all the kinds of products and manufacturing that Canada has some level of expertise in, I believe that the government ought to be focusing more on some of those larger opportunities.

The question of Africa is an important one and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade referred to North Africa and the Middle East, but for the Conservative government Africa has been largely off the map. I think there is a broad consensus emerging that the relationship between Canada and Africa has to go from being primarily one of aid provision to trade opportunity and the opportunity is significant.

I have spoken to people including David Rubenstein, head of The Carlyle Group, who believes that perhaps the best continent in the world to invest in over the next 10 years will be Africa. There is a great opportunity for us and there are tremendous historic ties that Canada has with Africa. We have some real advantages in terms of our relationship with Africa that I believe we ought to be focusing more on.

I would like to come back to this free trade agreement because notwithstanding my questioning of the government's overall macro trade policy focus, I believe that these kinds of agreements are helpful. I would like to see a lot more focus on some of the larger long-term opportunities for Canada.

The Jordanian economy is predicted to grow by 3% this year and 3.7% in 2011. It is a stable market, albeit a relatively small market for Canadian exporters. Like most of Canada's FTAs, this FTA includes agreements on the environment and labour cooperation that will help promote sustainability, and protect and ensure labour rights. More specifically, the Canada-Jordan labour cooperation agreement recognized both countries' obligations under the International Labour Organization, ILO, Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work including the protection of the following rights: the right to freedom of association, the right to collective bargaining, the abolition of child labour, the elimination of forced or compulsory labour, and the elimination of discrimination.

Both the labour cooperation agreement and the agreement on the environment include complaints and dispute resolution processes that enable members of the public to request an investigation into perceived failures of Canada or Jordan to comply with these agreements.

Government Orders

Canada already has one free trade agreement in place in the region generally. That is the FTA with Israel that has been in place since 1997. This agreement, however, is the first Canada has signed with an Arab country. It is fitting that this agreement would be, and this precedent would be set, with Jordan. Canada and Jordan share a friendly and constructive relationship as exemplified by our recent agreement on cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

• (1235)

Jordan has shown considerable leadership in pursuit of peace in the Middle East and has had a peace treaty with Israel since October 1994. Jordan has also helped to foster deeper relations and a greater understanding between the west and the Arab world. On the trade front, Jordan already has free trade agreements with some of Canada's most important trading partners. The FTA with the U.S. went into effect in December 2001. Jordan's FTA with the European Union went into effect in May 2002 and its FTA with the European Free Trade Association went into effect in September 2002.

Canada and Jordan also signed a foreign investment promotion and protection agreement, FIPA, at the same time as the free trade agreement on June 28, 2009. However, unlike the FTA, the FIPA is already in place. In fact, it went into effect on December 14, 2009. I am curious as to why the FIPA was kept as a separate agreement, even though the FTA and the FIPA were signed at the same time.

The FIPA is based on the principle of national treatment, from an investor's perspective that a Canadian investor in Jordan will be treated identically to a Jordanian investor in Jordan and vice versa. We have to treat Jordanian investors in Canada as we would treat our own investors. The principle of national treatment in the FIPA agreement is quite core to free trade agreements.

When considering the Bloc Québécois' public position against some measures within free trade agreements, it is curious that this FIPA includes measures that guarantee national treatment, often called investor-state provisions. We do welcome the support from Bloc members for this free trade agreement, but I would remind them that, if they are opposed to investor-state provisions and national treatment, the FIPA agreement has not been tabled in the House.

If that is an area that is of interest to the Bloc, in terms of investor-state provisions and the whole area of national treatment, the government has curiously chosen first, to separate the FIPA from this free trade agreement and second, to table only the free trade agreement in the House. In some ways, this contravenes the government's own policy on tabling treaties in Parliament. If one reads from the Conservative policy on tabling treaties in Parliament that went into effect on January 25, 2008, it says:

The objective of this policy is to ensure that all instruments governed by public international law, between Canada and other states or international organisations, are tabled in the House of Commons following their signature or adoption by other procedure and prior to Canada formally notifying that it is bound by the Instrument.

The FIPA with Jordan was signed in June 2009 and went into effect in December 2009, but it has never been tabled in the House. I can quote the member for Beauce, who was the foreign affairs minister at that time. He said:

As of today, all treaties between Canada and other states or entities, and which are considered to be governed by public international law, will be tabled in the House of Commons

He continued describing the government's commitment when he said:

This reflects our government's commitment to democracy and accountability. By submitting our international treaties to public scrutiny, we are delivering on our promise for a more open and transparent government.

I think it is important to remind the House that that was a firm commitment by the government to table all international treaties in the House. While the government has tabled the FTA with Jordan, it has not tabled the FIPA, the agreement on investments. I believe it ought to have done that prior to final ratification. This is not the first time the Conservative government has contradicted its own policy or commitment to democracy and accountability.

• (1240)

We know what has happened with prorogation and the attack of the government on democratic values. The Conservative government failed to table the buy American deal. It could not table that agreement because it had prorogued the House, which seemed rather convenient because it held a press conference on the buy American deal and only a week later provided the actual agreement leaving opposition and Canadians asking questions as to where the beef is on this.

Ultimately, we found out that the deal was not only late in coming, almost too late to benefit Canadians in terms of access to the American stimulus package, but it was also very weak in terms of the kinds of protection it provided to Canadian workers.

In terms of trade, the Conservative government has broadly failed to defend our interest with our largest trading partner, the U.S., and it has failed to diversify our trade relations by aggressively pursuing trade deals with the world's largest emerging markets.

We are a trade dependent nation, 80% of our economy and millions of Canadian jobs depend on our ability to access foreign markets. History would tell us that from beaver pelts in the past to BlackBerry's today, Canada's prosperity has been forged in the markets of the world. We prosper because we can and we must compete.

Canada is a world leader in efficient natural resource extraction, as an example. Our manufactured goods are known around the world for quality and innovation. It is because Canada has the ingenuity and expertise to benefit from free trade. Canada profited when we signed the Auto Pact with the U.S. We have prospered under NAFTA.

However, under this government, in 2009, Canada faced its first trade deficit in 30 years. Unless Canada takes real and meaningful action to diversify our trade relations, we run the risk of falling behind as other countries diversify theirs.

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I would like to speak for a moment on the whole issue of climate change, not on the environment and climate change, not in terms of environmental responsibility but in terms of economic opportunities. The fact is, around the world, countries are putting a price on carbon. We have seen it in various countries in the EU, and we have seen the EU move broadly. We see today in the U.S. there are three pieces of legislation under debate, the Waxman-Markey bill, the Cantwell-Collins bill, and more recently the development of senator Lindsey Graham's initiative with senator Joe Lieberman and senator John Kerry.

We do not know what is going to happen in the U.S. Congress. We are familiar with the dysfunctionality of Congress from time to time. However, I believe at some point, and quite possibly in the next few months, we will see some form of carbon pricing come out of the U.S.

Whether it is in the next few months or the next few years, we know that the world is putting a price on carbon. We also know that even in China, according to Fan Gang, who is one of the pre-eminent economists in China and, in fact, one of the authors of the five year plan, it is actually considering a carbon pricing mechanism for its next five year plan.

As the world puts a price on carbon, particularly in the protectionist U.S., we expect carbon price border pricing mechanisms to be included in those carbon tariffs. What it means for Canada in the long-term, in our high carbon economy, is that we will become less competitive than we are right now.

The approach of the Conservative government is to wait and see what the U.S. is going to do in terms of carbon pricing. That is a high-risk approach because the fact is that when the U.S. comes to a legislative or an administrative conclusion in terms of what to do with pricing carbon and it imposes it on us through the form of a carbon tariff, that could potentially have a very deleterious effect on our economy.

Canada is the biggest energy provider to the U.S., which means that we have a vested interest in the decisions made now in the U.S. Congress and by the U.S. administration. We should not be sitting back waiting for them to conclude those discussions. We ought to be engaged as their biggest energy provider.

We ought to be working more closely with them to develop cleaner energy solutions, cleaner conventional energy and alternative energy. We ought to be working with them to modernize energy grids and strengthen transmission, and to go toward smart grid and smart meters.

We ought to be working more closely with them to build a Canada-U.S. energy strategy that could help insulate us against the potential risk of a carbon pricing mechanism that is reached in the U.S. without any consultation with Canada, but also more fundamentally, to render both our economies more competitive in the emerging green economy in a global carbon constrained world.

●(1245)

At the World Economic Forum this year in Davos, Canada's Conservative Prime Minister was alone among all foreign leaders when he insisted that measures to address climate change will hurt the economy with "real impacts on jobs and economic growth". He

went on further to say, "There are serious trade-offs with economic imperatives in the short term". His view was completely out of step with global leaders, including in recent months, President Obama.

Around the world, the conversation about climate change has gone from one of environmental responsibility to one of economic opportunity. Canada, as a major energy producer, can build on our expertise within the traditional energy sector to become a green energy superpower. We can position Canada as a global leader. We can position Canada as a clean energy partner for China and India, but only if we have a federal strategy, a national strategy working with the provinces.

Other countries have used their stimulus packages to become more competitive, to build more competitiveness in the global carbon constrained economy. The U.S. invested six times more per capita than Canada in clean energy through its stimulus package. Canada was among the lowest in the OECD in terms of green stimulus spending.

In December, China and the Obama administration in the U.S. signed an agreement on carbon capture and storage technology. Canada was not even at the table. This is an area where Canada has a comparative advantage. Forty per cent of the carbon stored in the world is sequestered in Weyburn, Saskatchewan. Weyburn resulted from the federal government's investment, at that time the Martin Liberal government, and the private sector to make that happen. It is a world-class facility in Weyburn with world-class technology.

Yet we were not at the table when China signed a deal with our largest trading partner, the U.S., on CO₂ sequestration. This year, according to energy secretary Chu in the U.S., the U.S. is investing \$3 billion in CO₂ sequestration technology, and that is being partnered with \$7 billion of private sector investment.

We have a narrow window of opportunity to maintain our advancement in terms of CO₂ sequestration, but we are going to lose that very quickly as China and the U.S. move forward more quickly than we are doing in terms of investment and in terms of innovation.

The competition for leadership in the new green economy is fierce. China in 2008 became the largest producer of solar panels in the world. In 2009 China became the largest producer of wind turbines in the world.

We cannot wait while other countries act. If there was a first mover advantage, Canada would probably get it, but there is only a first mover advantage and other countries are moving. Canada is just sitting back and waiting.

At Davos this year, U.S. Republican Senator Lindsey Graham said:

Six months ago my biggest worry was that an emissions deal would make American business less competitive compared to China. Now my concern is that every day that we delay trying to find a price for carbon is a day that China uses to dominate the green economy. China has made a long-term strategic decision and they are going gang-busters.

Government Orders

We need to deepen our energy relationship with the U.S. We must focus on coordinated carbon pricing mechanisms, integrated smart energy grid corridors and green technology research, development and partnerships. We must build on the Canada-U.S. relationship but at the same time, we need to become China's and India's clean energy partner.

We need a long-term strategic approach to ensuring that not only do we defend our interests in the U.S. against American protectionism, but also in the 21st century that Canada has diversified trading relationships around the world in the area where we have our strongest comparative advantage, and that is clean energy and clean energy solutions.

• (1250)

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in his comments the member for Kings—Hants mentioned that there has been some delay in tabling this legislation, but he would be well aware that the agreement was signed on June 28, 2009 and tabled on September 15, 2009. That included a copy of the free trade agreement between Canada and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the explanatory memorandum, as well as a copy of the agreement on the environment, a copy of the agreement on trade, and a copy of the agreement on labour co-operation.

I very much appreciate his comments and his support for this agreement. Plain and simple, this is a minority Parliament and legislation cannot get through the House without a cooperative attitude. I look forward to that not just on this agreement, but on others as well.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, my point was actually on the FIPA agreement, the foreign investment promotion and protection agreement. For some reason the government chose in this case to have a separate agreement, to separate the FIPA from the free trade agreement and to only table the free trade agreement in the House prior to ratification. In fact, the FIPA has already been signed and has gone into effect with Jordan.

I would appreciate hearing from the parliamentary secretary on behalf of the government why the government separated these two agreements and why it broke its commitment to table all foreign agreements of this nature in the House for debate and parliamentary ratification prior to their going into effect.

Again, the foreign investment protection and promotion agreement has already gone into effect without having come to this House.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed the comments by the member for Kings—Hants. He always defends well his position.

I agree with some of his comments, particularly on the delay the government has put into effect on the agreement itself. An eight month delay is absolutely ridiculous when all four corners of the House were saying to move this forward.

I disagree on one comment he made around NAFTA. As we all know, since the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement was implemented, most Canadians' family incomes have actually declined, not

gone up. It is only the very wealthy in Canada who have seen their incomes go up.

His comments were interesting. I would like to ask him a specific question on the agreement with Jordan. Obviously there will be some concerns expressed around the agreement and some amendments will be brought forward.

Would the member support an independent assessment of the human rights and labour rights situation in Jordan as an amendment to the bill and the agreement? In other words, independent and impartial human rights organizations and labour rights organizations would evaluate how Jordan is actually implementing its responsibilities under the agreement.

• (1255)

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, I believe that one of the benefits of free trade agreements is that it gives us the capacity not only to discuss and engage on human rights issues during the debate of free trade agreements in the House, which we have seen on Jordan and which we are going to see at committee, but also on an ongoing basis. What I would actually like to see is more engagement on a long-term basis on human rights issues.

On the issue of whether to do an impact assessment of a free trade agreement that has yet to be signed, it is almost impossible to do a legitimate impact assessment of a free trade agreement that has not been signed. Frankly, one cannot with absolute certainty know the impact of a free trade agreement on human rights until we actually see an agreement in place and can evaluate.

I can tell the House that if we isolate a country, it is very clear that our capacity to engage in human rights is reduced. Engaging other countries economically fortifies our capacity to engage them on human rights.

That has been the position of my party for a long time, going back to Pierre Trudeau who was no slouch on human rights, but who saw the wisdom of opening up China. In fact, he was the first western government leader to establish trade relations and economic relations with post-revolution China. He did that because he believed very strongly in human rights and understood the capacity and the importance of economic engagement to foster better human rights.

The hon. member and I perhaps differ on this. He believes that somehow legitimate economic opportunity comes at the expense of human rights. I believe that Canadian companies and investors can do a lot to strengthen human rights in places like Jordan, Colombia and other countries around the world.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Mr. Speaker, earlier the parliamentary secretary stated that, given that there is a minority government, free trade agreements cannot be signed without cooperation from the other parties.

In terms of the free trade agreement with Colombia, we know he can count on the Liberal Party.

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The member for Kings—Hants said that an agreement would have to be signed in order to do an impact assessment. A committee report accepted by the Liberal party says quite clearly that, before a free trade agreement is signed with Colombia, the impact such an agreement would have on human rights should be studied to be sure that the situation is steadily improving.

Now that the member has given his support for the free trade agreement with Colombia, is the member not saying the opposite of what he is doing?

[*English*]

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from the hon. member, although it is not on Jordan, because he brings me to the issue of free trade between Canada and Colombia.

The fact is we have proposed, and the government has indicated that absolutely it would support at committee, an amendment to the ratification legislation for the free trade agreement with Colombia that would ensure on an annual basis that reports written by both Canada and the Government of Colombia on both countries' human rights and the impact assessment of this free trade agreement would be tabled in both parliaments. This means that on an ongoing basis, every year, we would have the opportunity at trade committee to hear from witnesses, to discuss those reports and to engage with the people of Colombia, with labour organizations, with human rights organizations, with civil society organizations, in an ongoing discussion of this. In fact, that is a far stronger commitment to some independent assessment prior to an agreement that has not even gone into effect yet.

We want to see the effect of the real agreement, not the hypothetical potential effect of an agreement that has not even been signed.

Keep in mind that these free trade agreements can be cancelled or annulled by either country with six months' notice. If there is some reason a future Canadian government decides it is not in Canada's interest or reflective of Canadian values to continue the trade relationship, the government has the capacity to do that.

• (1300)

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would be interested in the hon. member commenting further on the hidey-hole strategy of the current government with respect to the U.S. and its unwillingness to engage in a proactive strategy with respect to the pricing of carbon, et cetera.

Certainly in Montreal last weekend where there was a very high level policy conference, there was a ridiculing of the cap and trade and a recognition that the taxing of carbon had to be done in some manner or another, a pricing of carbon.

I would be interested in his comments on the dangers of the current government's strategy of having essentially no strategy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. Before I go to the member for Kings—Hants, I just want to remind all members that we are debating Bill C-8 today, the free trade agreement between Canada and Jordan.

The hon. member for Kings—Hants, a short answer, please.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, in fact, it does have an effect on our trade relations with every country in the world, including Jordan. Our competitiveness and the vigour of our relationship with the U.S. economically affects all of our trade relationships. I share with the hon. member his concern that allowing the Americans to effectively determine their approach to carbon pricing and then impose it on us is irresponsible from a national sovereignty perspective as Canadians, but it is also very dangerous economically.

Part of the consideration the Americans are going through right now is potentially a carbon tax being applied to transportation fuels, cap and trade on utilities. We should be engaged in the discussion with them.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, before I begin speaking about Bill C-8, I would like to congratulate the wonderful initiative of those who organized Earth Hour. On Saturday, more than 10 million Canadians and nearly a billion people throughout the world symbolically turned out their lights for an hour from 8:30 to 9:30 p.m. In Montreal, Hydro-Québec turned off the logo on its head office. Even the Canadian Parliament participated. In all, more than 3,400 cities in more than 125 countries took part in Earth Hour.

Since we know how important the fight against climate change is to the Conservatives, we do not need to talk about the importance of rallying together to send a clear message to our representatives. We need to be giving this issue more attention. I would also like to take a moment to mention the exceptional work of my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie in the fight against climate change.

Having said that, let us return to today's topic of debate, the free trade agreement between Canada and Jordan. The Bloc Québécois generally supports this bill. However, we believe certain aspects should be revisited. The Bloc Québécois has come to this conclusion because, as always, it methodically studied this agreement and concluded that, for the most part, it respected the values of our party, and hence those of Quebecers.

Last week, I rose in the House to denounce the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement because it does not in the least respect the principles defended by the Bloc Québécois—fundamental principles such as human rights and workers' rights, as well as respect for the environment. I can assure the House that we will rise and speak out as long as a treaty or government decision does not respect this moral standard.

In this case, there is no indication of a transgression of these principles and we even salute the efforts that may be undertaken. However, we must ask ourselves why sign an agreement with Jordan when our trade with this country only represents \$92 million in goods? More importantly, trade with Quebec only represents a meagre \$32 million.

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Nevertheless, we believe that this agreement is necessary to balance our support in this part of the world. Knowing full well that Canada has already approved a free trade agreement with Israel, it is important, considering the tense political situation in the Middle East, to send a clear message to this region that we are open to fair trade and agreements with all nations in the region. This could even promote better relations between the East and the West and open doors to certain eastern countries that wish to cultivate better economic relations with the West.

Nor should we ignore the considerable efforts made by Jordan to modernize its government and its economy. These efforts will help deal with the difficulties created by the incredible gap between rich and poor. We should herald these efforts. Implementing this agreement would send, once more, a clear message to other Middle Eastern countries that it is important that they modernize their governments and economies.

A moment ago I said that Jordan is not a major player in terms of trade with Canada and Quebec. Despite that, the Bloc Québécois nevertheless believes that this agreement would be beneficial for Quebec. As the private woodlot critic for the Bloc Québécois, I am extremely troubled by the forestry crisis, which affects so many Canadian workers and especially Quebec workers. It is especially troubling knowing that nearly \$10 billion was invested in the Ontario auto industry, while next to nothing has been invested in Quebec.

● (1305)

For some time now, the Bloc Québécois has been calling for loans and loan guarantees at the market rate for the Quebec forestry industry, as well as a comprehensive policy to support and modernize the forestry industry, including a policy to use wood in the construction of federal buildings. Bill C-429, introduced by my colleague from Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, will help with that.

Furthermore, private woodlot owners in Quebec have been the forgotten ones in this forestry crisis. They need to be taken care of as well, perhaps through some sort of tax measures. Accordingly, the creation of a registered silvicultural savings plan would be a very important tool for these private woodlot owners. This could also one day, I hope, make it possible for them to export pulp and paper around the world, particularly to Jordan, the subject of our debate here today.

Despite everything I just said, the Bloc Québécois sees this agreement as a positive step for the Quebec forestry industry. Let us not be idealistic: this agreement is in no way a concrete solution to the Conservatives' inaction when it comes to the forestry industry, particularly in Quebec. However, the fact remains that this agreement would mean significant gains for this industry, one that has been in crisis for far too long.

There was \$32 million worth of trade between Quebec and Jordan in 2008. Of this amount, \$25 million was for our pulp and paper industry, which is a significant amount. Since Jordan has an obvious lack of forestry resources, because of its climate, and since the Quebec pulp and paper industry has been ignored by the Conservative government for a long time, the agreement being debated right now is an interesting solution to compensate for the lack of resources in Jordan and the Conservatives' passive attitude towards this industry.

As I mentioned earlier, the Bloc Québécois and I think that there are some points that will have to be reviewed and debated in order to justify an agreement of this nature.

As deputy natural resources critic for the Bloc Québécois, I, along with my Bloc Québécois colleagues, think that we absolutely must ensure that Quebec's significant water resources are clearly excluded from the agreement, to ensure that Quebec remains in control of its water resources. Although this is not mentioned in the agreement itself, this condition absolutely must be included in the agreement.

We will have the opportunity to examine the agreement more closely in committee over the next few weeks.

Although the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement is unacceptable in terms of agriculture, that is not the case with this agreement with Jordan. In contrast to Bill C-2 concerning Canada and Colombia, because of the small size of Jordan's market and the type of agriculture practised there, there is not likely to be a negative impact on either our Quebec agricultural producers or agricultural producers in Jordan. It is very important for us to respect our own agricultural producers, as well as those in the countries with which we are signing or trying to sign an agreement.

● (1310)

I am a farmer, and it is important to farmers to consider the particular agricultural situation in countries and help them develop. In Quebec, the Union des producteurs agricoles approved this agreement and said that it did not pose any problems. We could talk about farming for a long time in the House.

It is alarming to see what the Conservatives are doing about such a crucial issue. The government is definitely showing its ignorance and incompetence. Farming as it is practised here could be improved with some practical, low-cost, workable measures. There is no shortage of ideas; the Bloc Québécois has presented a whole list of practical solutions. There is a shortage of political will, though, especially among the Conservatives.

Knowing the government's intentions and where farming figures on its priority list, we find it hard not to be worried about the future of farming in Canada and especially in Quebec.

But let us come back to the free trade agreement between Canada and Jordan. The Bloc Québécois also condemns the Conservative strategy of signing bilateral agreements with other governments instead of the multilateral agreements we have long been suggesting.

The Bloc Québécois firmly believes that a multilateral approach is a better way to develop fairer trade and respect the interests of all the countries of the world.

In order for trade to be mutually beneficial, it must first be fair. The free trade agreement between Canada and Colombia is hardly fair, but the Conservatives, like the Liberals, do not seem too concerned about that.

A trading system that leads to the exploitation of poor countries and dumping in rich countries is not viable. The Bloc Québécois cannot accept a system of free trade that would be based on the lowest common denominator. We also cannot accept free trade agreements where the absence of environmental or labour standards puts a great deal of pressure on our industries, especially our traditional industries. It is very difficult for them to compete with products that are manufactured with no regard for basic social rights.

To make trade agreements fairer, the Bloc Québécois is urging the federal government to revise its positions in trade negotiations in order to ensure that trade agreements include clauses ensuring compliance with international labour standards as well as respect for human rights and the environment.

The Bloc Québécois believes that if Canada wants to maintain its credibility on this front, it should immediately sign on to the International Labour Organization's principal conventions against various forms of discrimination, forced labour and child labour, as well as those in support of the right to organize and collective bargaining.

Those are the issues we should focus on in our trade agreements. It is clear that the Conservatives—and lately, the Liberals, with their obvious complicity concerning the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement bill—have no desire to consider these issues.

The Bloc Québécois' support for Bill C-8 is a one-time-only offer. We will continue to keep a close eye on agreements signed between Canada and other countries. If Canada fails to respect the fundamental principles that our party stands for and the interests of the Quebec nation, we, the members of the Bloc Québécois, will stand up to criticize such agreements and do everything in our power to cancel or change them.

• (1315)

We will never ignore such legitimate issues, and we will never support such injustices, as the Liberal members have done with the Colombia free trade agreement.

I hope that the federal government will consider these principles in future agreements. That should go without saying, but the members opposite seem to have forgotten these humanitarian ideas.

All the same, every time the Conservative Party or any other party in power chooses to ignore these issues, the Bloc Québécois can be counted on to call them on it and defend these principles. This is about respect for human rights, for workers' rights, for the environment and for Quebec's interests.

[English]

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, two weeks ago I had the pleasure of meeting with Tom Dufresne, president of the ILWU, the longshoremen's union in Vancouver. I met with a number of executive members who talked to me about trade and how their members worked on the ports of Vancouver and the Lower Mainland, in fact all of British Columbia and across the country. They are dependent upon Canada having a free flow of goods between nations all over the world. However, he said that its membership was keenly aware that free trade must be linked with fair trade and principles of fair trade. They do not want to trade with anybody unloading cargo that comes from countries with brutal

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human rights records, where there is systematic discrimination or racism, or illegal behaviour by international norms. I think that is representative of many workers and Canadians across the country.

Does the member believe that entering into a privileged trade agreement with Jordan, in the absence of having an independent human rights assessment done in advance of that, is sound policy for our country?

• (1320)

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Guimond: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question and comments.

The Bloc Québécois is in favour of independent studies, particularly in relation to Bill C-2, in order to evaluate the agreement's impact on human rights in the countries involved.

My colleague also spoke about fair trade, which is an issue I feel strongly about, as does the Bloc Québécois. It is not overly complicated and, if we made the effort, it would be very easy to engage in fair trade. Fair trade has three pillars: respect for the environment in all dealings, respect for the economy—agreements must be economically viable—and respect for the social rights and societies involved in the agreements.

If the Government of Canada included these few guidelines and principles in its international trade policies, Canada's image in terms of globalization would be transformed.

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Before I go to questions and comments again, I will remind hon. members that we are debating Bill C-8, the free trade bill between Canada and Jordan, not Bill C-2, the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement. Clearly there would be issues that would overlap the two, but questions that deal specifically and explicitly with other legislation are out of order and will not be accepted.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I hope that the Conservatives understand that your warning is meant for the government members who seem to be wandering away from the debate on the agreement with Jordan. I hope they understand.

I have two questions about Bill C-8 for my colleague from Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques. I really enjoy working with him in committee.

We began talking about this agreement eight months ago. The Conservatives tried to hide this agreement behind another one, which I will not name. That pushed the debate back eight months. It is slightly odd that they are finally introducing the bill today. Why does my colleague feel that the government waited so long to present this agreement?

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I would also like to ask him the same question that I asked our colleague from Kings—Hants. Would the Bloc Québécois be willing to amend the bill to ensure that an independent and impartial evaluation of the human rights situation in Jordan is undertaken before the agreement is implemented and that these evaluations then continue on a regular basis?

Mr. Claude Guimond: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Burnaby—New Westminster for his comments. I also enjoy working with him on the Standing Committee on International Trade.

Approximately two of the eight months of delay can be blamed on prorogation, which was bad for us and for Canadian democracy. This has already been thoroughly discussed.

As we all know, last fall the Conservatives tried very hard to force Bill C-23, regarding the agreement with Colombia, down our throats.

My colleague from Trois-Rivières and I will be very vigilant on the Standing Committee on International Trade regarding the issue of water and the possibility of assessing the human rights situation for this agreement and all future agreements.

• (1325)

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Mr. Speaker, clearly, water is excluded from the implementation agreement with Jordan, but the exemption does not appear in the text. A few years ago, the House passed a motion calling on the government to exclude the export of water to the United States explicitly from NAFTA.

As we have heard, agriculture in Jordan is very difficult because it has a very dry climate. Does my colleague fear that we may one day have to export water from Quebec to Jordan?

Mr. Claude Guimond: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question.

The members of the Bloc Québécois and I personally will be very vigilant about the issue of water in this agreement. Water is Quebec's blue gold. It is very important. We are very careful about how we manage it. In the course of review in committee, we will ensure that we are fully satisfied with all proposed amendments.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques. I could have asked him a number of questions.

We are entitled, as members of the Standing Committee on International Trade, to make amendments to this bill.

Is he prepared to consider all possible amendments to strengthen this agreement and to address all the concerns that could be raised by witnesses who may appear in committee?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques for a short answer.

Mr. Claude Guimond: Mr. Speaker, the shortest possible answer is yes. As it does every day, the Bloc Québécois will work hard on examining this agreement, as it has done for all the other agreements. Rest assured that we are interested in hearing everything that happens in committee and in studying any amendments that are made.

[English]

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-8, which is the implementing law for the trade agreement between Canada and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

I will start by referencing the delay the government has put on. We have heard a lot of rhetoric around this deal as we have heard from previous deals the government has put forward. However, it is important to do a reality check. The government had a green light from all four corners of the House from the very beginning to bring it to committee. There are some major concerns that I will raise and reference a little later on.

I think it is fair to say that the controversy around Bill C-2 and the Colombia agreement is very clear and palpable on the floor of the House. With the Jordan agreement, all four corners of the House wanted to bring it forward, have it debated and sent to committee where we could have heard from the many witnesses who have an interest in this. The committee could then have made the necessary amendments.

However, for eight months the government has refused to bring it forward. For eight months it has hidden behind the Colombia deal and stalled on this bill. Far from agreeing with the rhetoric that this is another important step forward in trade policy for the government, we need to ask why the government stalled for eight months on this when it was given the green light to at least bring it to committee within a few days. All four corners of the House asked for it to be brought forward and the government said no, that it would not do that.

This speaks to a larger problem, which is the complete incoherence of the government's trade policy and industrial policy in general. For four years we have seen the kind of legislation the government brings forward. It is fair to say that the NDP has been front and centre in standing up to what the government has brought forward, but the delay around the Jordan bill just shows the dilettantism of the government when it comes to trade policy.

This is no small issue. When we look at the last 20 years, since the implementation of the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement, the real income of most Canadian families has gone down not up. The real incomes of the two-thirds of Canadian families who comprise the middle-class and poor Canadians have gone down right across the country.

The only ones who have actually profited and seen an increase in their real income over the past 20 years, since the first implementation of these agreements, have been the wealthiest of Canadians. The wealthy 10% have seen their incomes skyrocket. One-fifth of Canadians, the wealthiest 20%, now take most of the real income in this country.

To say that the free trade agreements that have been brought in by the Liberals and Conservatives have led to instant prosperity is simply false. Statistics Canada puts the lie to those pretensions that this is somehow a coherent and smart industrial and economic strategy. There has been no economic strategy, no real focused trade strategy and the result has been that most Canadians are poor.

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We need to ask about the actual record of the government since it came to power. We saw the softwood lumber sellout, which killed jobs right across this country, including 2,000 in the two communities in my riding of Burnaby—New Westminster. We have seen the shipbuilding sellout, which was opposed by the NDP because we heard from hundreds of shipyard workers from across the country, including Quebec, Atlantic Canada and British Columbia, who said that this would have a huge negative impact on their industry.

The government did no impact studies. It was just flying by the seat of its pants. It was out-manoeuvred by Liechtenstein. I hesitate to say it, but it is true that Liechtenstein, a tiny country in Europe, actually out-manoeuvred the Conservative government.

• (1330)

We saw the softwood sellout, the shipbuilding sellout and the Colombia trade deal, which we can discuss another day because I know we should stick to Jordan, but the government's record is extremely poor.

What are our competitors doing? Our competitors are investing in export promotion support. The United States, Australia and the European Union are spending hundreds of millions of dollars every year in providing support for their export industries and export promotion supports. What are we doing? If the government actually wants to go beyond its dilettante approach on trade issues, what is it doing?

I was in Argentina last week with a number of hon. members, including my colleague from Honoré-Mercier, and we found out, astoundingly, that the Conservative government's total budget in export product promotion support for the emerging market of Argentina, a country of 40 million people and the wealthiest market in South America, is \$400 a week. That is less than the average *dépanneur* in Quebec and the average corner store in Burnaby—New Westminster will spend for a marketing radius that is a few blocks on either side.

That is repeated across the board. In the United States we spend paltry cents on the dollar compared to other countries, like Australia. Its total budget for export promotion support is half a billion dollars. Our total budget is a few million dollars. This is what is wrong with the government's approach. It simply does not provide the kinds of supports that other major industrialized countries, our competitors, do.

What the NDP has been saying ever since the Conservative government came to power is that it needs to change that approach. The government simply cannot go to these trade agreement ribbon cuttings and expect that the job is done or will be done. Most Canadians are the poorer for it. Canada is making less and less as a result. We had our first export deficit in 20 years a few months ago. Obviously, there is something wrong with this approach.

Even if these trade agreements were fair trade based as opposed to the old NAFTA template model, do the trade agreements themselves make a difference? Obviously not, because with a number of these bilateral agreements our exports have actually gone down in those markets after being signed. In every case, imports from the countries that we have signed with have gone up. In other words, those

countries have managed to profit from the agreements signed with Canada but in Canada's case, exports have actually gone down. How can we sign an agreement and not have the follow-up or strategy to bolster our exports? That is, indeed, what has happened.

The problem with the government's overall approach is that it not only has no industrial strategy but it also does not have an export-oriented focus and it is not willing to invest Canadian government funds in the way that other countries do to bolster their industries.

As there has been some rhetoric flying around the House this morning on this agreement, I should note that this whole idea that Canada should not be trying to protect and sustain certain key industries is something that every other industrialized economy has adopted and put forward as part of their industrial strategy. The Conservative government is seemingly selling out every industry in our country, but France, the United States and every other country are focused on investing in their key industries.

• (1335)

The NDP gets criticized by the Liberals and Conservatives for bringing forward buy Canada strategies but that is where the rest of the world is. It is ensuring it has a strong foundation.

Far from making things together, which is sort of the spin, the buzzwords that we hear from the Conservatives, Canadians are making less and less, exporting more and more raw materials, whether it is raw logs or raw bitumen, across the line, and those jobs end up elsewhere. That is the fundamental problem with how the government approaches economic issues generally and trade policy in particular.

Now we can talk about the more specific aspects of the Jordan agreement. As I mentioned earlier, this agreement needs to have a thorough vetting at the committee stage and amendments need to be brought forward for reasons that I will mention in a few moments. What we are endeavouring to do is to get this to committee so we can hear from labour activists, human rights advocates and from those who are concerned about women's equality because those are all issues that have been cited in some of the many reports that have come up about problems with Jordan.

It is fair to say that Jordan has made progress in a number of different areas. Jordan is certainly not Colombia with the horrific death toll, disappearances and killings of labour activists that are a tragic daily reality in Colombia with paramilitaries tied to the government and the Colombian military. In a very real sense, Jordan has tried to make progress and I will mention some of that progress later on.

However, the agreement itself is a NAFTA template style agreement, with investor state provisions that we have raised concerns about before, and labour and environment cooperation agreements that are toothless, which is the overall problem and the reason we will need to bring strong amendments to this bill at the committee stage.

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There is no doubt that Canadian values are betrayed when we have toothless components around labour rights and environmental stewardship. Most Canadians want to see very robust protections there. We also undermine our own Canadian values when we subject the kind of democratic decision-making with an override, which is the investor state provisions of NAFTA. We have raised this issue before in the House. This is simply, in our minds, not the appropriate route to go.

Given the framework of the agreement, which is inadequate and is a template from which other countries have moved away and are looking at more fair trade approaches to their trading relationships, what is happening in Jordan? What are the issues?

I would like to cite three reports. The first report is from the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor which was released a couple of weeks ago on March 11. It is the 2009 country reports on human rights practices in which it cites Jordan and states:

Restrictive legislation and regulations limited freedom of speech and press, and government interference in the media and threats of fines and detention led to self-censorship, according to journalists and human rights organizations. The government also continued to restrict freedoms of assembly and association. Religious activists and opposition political party members reported a decline in government harassment; however, legal and societal discrimination remained a problem for women, religious minorities, converts from Islam, and some persons of Palestinian origin. Local human rights organizations reported widespread violence against women and children. The government restricted labor rights, and local and international human rights organizations reported high levels of abuse of foreign domestic workers.

The report goes on to cite some of the specific areas of concern around respect for human rights. I think it is important to mention those reports and to flag some of the comparisons with other countries.

Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

There were reports during the year that the government or its agents committed unlawful killings.

● (1340)

On November 8, Saddam Al Saoud died of injuries allegedly sustained in police custody at the Al Hussein Police Station. On October 17, police arrested Al Saoud during a fight between street vendors in Amman. On October 18, authorities transferred an unconscious Al Saoud to a private hospital. Al Saoud's family said police caused Al Saoud's injuries when they hit him on the head with a gun. The Public Security Department (PSD) investigated the case, arrested six police officers, and charged them with two felonies: death caused by hitting and abuse of PSD regulations. At year's end cases against the officers were ongoing.

They also cite one other case, that of Fakhri Kreishan, who died of injuries sustained during an altercation with police in the southern city of Ma'an. Again police prosecutors investigated the case, arrested the police officer and charged him with two felonies. The case before the police court was ongoing.

In terms of unlawful deprivation of life, we have two incidences. It is fair to say that, in both cases, the police officers have been charged. That is important and it contrasts with other countries, most particularly Colombia, where the ongoing slaughter, and there is no other way of putting it, of human rights activists and labour activists was treated with impunity, where 95% of the cases did not lead to any sort of prosecution at all. In Jordan's case, the two cases have been followed up with charges.

Disappearances is category B. There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances, and that is welcome. Again it contrasts with other countries. I will take Colombia as an example, where

there have been widespread disappearances, hundreds of people who have simply disappeared in politically motivated kidnappings or killings done by paramilitaries tied to the Colombian government and the Colombian military. In Jordan's case, there were no reports of politically motivated disappearances in 2009.

Category C is torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. The report continues:

The law prohibits such practices; however international NGOs continued to allege that torture and mistreatment in police and security detention centers remained widespread. Nevertheless, some domestic NGOs claimed that recent reform efforts had reduced cases of torture and mistreatment in police and security detention centers.

The fact that NGOs are reporting that is welcome, and of course we contrast that with other countries. I will take Colombia, for example, where the Colombian Commission of Jurists has pointed out widespread cases of sexual abuse perpetrated by the Colombian military and by paramilitaries tied to the Colombian government.

For the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, there are obviously some concerns; however there are some indications of improvement.

I would like to move on to Human Rights Watch. Its "World Report 2010: Harsher Climate for Human Rights" cites concerns around migrant domestic workers and the abuse of women in Jordan. It states:

In 2010, Jordan should:

Strike clauses from the law that allow for punishment-reducing mitigating circumstances for "honor" killers.

Ease restrictions in the law governing the operation of nongovernmental organizations to bring it into compliance with international standards on freedom of association.

Revise regulations governing migrant domestic workers to comply with international labor and human rights standards, and set up a mechanism to investigate allegations of abuses against workers.

—again, a concern about domestic workers—

Strengthen accountability for torture by moving jurisdiction over acts of torture by police agents from the Police Court to civilian courts.

Stop withdrawing the nationality of Jordanian citizens of Palestinian origin.

These are concerns raised by Human Rights Watch.

The final report I would like to cite is done by Lubna Dawany Nimry, who is an attorney at law in Jordan, raising concerns about the treatment of women. She states that the number of so-called crimes of honour, and there is no other way of describing it except as abuse of women, averages about 25 a year.

Government Orders

•(1345)

She does reference the fact that civil rights activists were speaking out loudly and fighting this phenomenon and mentions that some members of the royal family have participated in demonstrations against article 98 and article 340 of the penal code. She sites that in some areas of Jordan, a woman's life is at risk if she talks to a man who is not a relative. She says very clearly that there is a need for substantial revisions to the code in Jordan to assure women's equality.

For those reasons, we raise concerns about this agreement.

Hon. Jim Abbott (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I apologize to my friend that I did not hear the first part of his speech, so I am not really sure if he declared whether the NDP is going to be voting for or against this bill.

I make note, however, that he has had to do a lot of research, and I commend him for that, in order to find something negative in this bill to talk about. If I understood the latter part of his speech, he was basically going through a shopping list that he or his researchers managed to uncover so that he could say something negative about this bill.

No matter whether it is a Conservative government or a Liberal government that attempts to open up opportunities in the world for increased trade or open up opportunities for new markets for Canadian businesses, it is really regrettable that the NDP will find any old way to find excuses to say we cannot do that, to say we have to have a closed shop kind of idea.

I regret that I did not hear the beginning of my colleague's speech. Did he state at the beginning if the NDP is going to vote in favour of this bill or not?

•(1350)

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I would like to say a couple of words about the member for Kootenay—Columbia. I have not had a chance to pay tribute to him in the House, and I understand he is not going to run again whenever the next election is held, whether it is this year, next year—

An hon. member: Or the year after.

Mr. Peter Julian: Or the year after, Mr. Speaker. He may be here longer than he wants to be. I certainly appreciate his contribution to the House, as all members do. I appreciate his raising this question today.

The reality is that the first part of my speech was where I criticized the government about the lack of follow-through—

Hon. Jim Abbott: I'm sorry I missed it.

Mr. Peter Julian: Yes, I am sorry the member missed it as well, Mr. Speaker.

The government simply does not walk the talk on trade issues. It does not provide the kind of export promotion support that all our major competitors do. It does not provide the internal protection for key strategic industries that all industrial economies do.

I criticized the government. I did say we were in favour of getting this bill to committee because we want to have a fulsome airing of this agreement. We want to hear from human rights activities, from women's rights activists and from labour activists as well. We want to get the bill to committee, but we want to see some major changes to this agreement as well.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member has raised in the House a number of issues on the Colombia deal, and I sense that he has some similar concerns with regard to the Jordan situation vis-à-vis human rights.

Last week the government seemed amenable to an amendment to Bill C-2, which in the record says:

there must be a prior written agreement between the governments of Canada and Colombia, where each country provides annual reports to their respective parliaments on the impact of this FTA on human rights in both Canada and Colombia.

I had to read the amendment again and I am still reading it, and I do not yet clearly understand what it means. If it does mean something and it would be helpful in terms of getting us over this hurdle of human rights concerns, I am wondering whether a similar provision in the Jordan trade deal might be applicable or appropriate in the circumstances. I am not sure. I do not think so, but maybe the member has some comments.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I want to state at the outset that Jordan is not Colombia. Colombia has one of the most appalling human rights records on the planet, the worst record on the entire planet for the massacring of labour activists, the worst record on the entire planet for the forced and violent theft of land of rural Colombians. Colombia is a horrible case study of what happens when there is no concern for human rights.

In Jordan there have been some improvements. For that reason, we want to see a fulsome vetting of the agreement at the committee stage.

However the member is absolutely right. He has a long experience in the House, and he knows that trade agreements, trade bills, are amendable by the House of Commons. We have been saying this for some time. It would have meant that we could have addressed some of the most egregious aspects of the softwood sellout or the shipbuilding sellout, but the reality is that the House has the right to amend these agreements. Now I think for every trade agreement that comes forward, the trade committee and the House will have to be seized by those amendments and by those changes. That is very important.

However, any assessment has to be independent. It cannot be the Colombian government evaluating itself. It cannot be the Jordanian government evaluating itself. It has to be an independent and impartial human rights assessment by one of the many organizations that actually specialize in ensuring that evaluation.

•(1355)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Mr. Speaker, apparently there is controversial legislation in Jordan having to do with freedom of association. The government has the power to dissolve any association. As far as we know, this is primarily aimed at radical Islamic groups, but it could also affect the right to unionize.

Statements by Members

How could this legislation be combined with the labour standards set out in the agreement?

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from the hon. member for Sherbrooke with whom I do enjoy working.

That is precisely the problem. The committee will have to address a host of difficulties. In addition to the ones mentioned by the hon. member, there are questions about women's rights. Divorced women who remarry lose custody of their children. If a child is born outside marriage, the same thing happens. Children are removed from women's care.

Even though Jordanian men can give Jordanian nationality to their wives and their children, Jordanian women do not have the same right. In Jordan, there is gender inequality and we have to address that and all the other concerns with this agreement raised by the Bloc and the NDP.

[English]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the member for a terrific speech as usual.

In response to a question that he just provided to the Conservative member, I sense that he was just on the verge of letting that member know that he was, in fact, quoting in terms of human rights abuses from the U.S. Department of State 2008 human rights report when he was outlining that, while things are nowhere near as bad in Jordan as they are in Colombia, he does have concerns about human rights abuses in Jordan as well.

I would like to ask the member, then, whether he could give us a better idea as to why he feels the Jordan agreement is substantially different than what the Canada-Colombia deal is all about.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, Jordan is not Colombia. Thank goodness. Colombia's appalling connection with the regime, with the paramilitary, the widespread killings by the Colombia military, the theft of land, which is all tied in this murky soup around the Colombia trade deal, is not present in the Jordanian agreement.

There is no doubt that the Jordanian agreement is weak on human rights. That may be something we could bolster with suggestions from human rights advocates, labour activists and women's rights activists. We may be able to make some changes. We will have to see.

However, the two situations are completely different.

Colombia has the worst human rights record on the planet when it comes to forced theft of land and killings of labour activists. Jordan has made some clear improvements. As I pointed in my speech, we are talking about two killings, both prosecuted in Jordan by authorities. In Colombia we are talking about hundreds of killings and virtual impunity. That alone should make the Conservatives take a step back and ask themselves what they are doing, trying to ram through this bad deal with Colombia when there are so many circumstances and so many Canadian values being repudiated by this pressure.

That is why I think the trade committee will be happy to take the Jordan agreement and pull it apart to see what the impacts are and try to put it back together. It is a far less egregious situation than the appalling situation in Colombia.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

PARKINSON'S AWARENESS MONTH

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, April is Parkinson's Awareness Month in Canada. It is one of the most common brain conditions affecting over 100,000 Canadians today. Parkinson's is chronic, progressive and results in increasing disability that dramatically impacts individuals, families and communities across Canada, including in my riding of Barrie, where Greg McGuinness has continued his hard work to combat this condition in our community with his annual fundraiser and events that raise awareness.

Integrated care and services, income security, protection from genetic discrimination and caregiver support are just a few of the key issues that impact daily life for people with Parkinson's and their families.

As we enter Parkinson's Awareness Month, I would like to encourage every member of Parliament to think about their constituents living with Parkinson's. This insidious disease affects men and women of every age, and they are relying on our leadership to help them live the highest quality and most productive lives possible.

* * *

● (1400)

[Translation]

12TH JUTRA AWARDS GALA

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the 12th Jutra awards gala, a not to be missed celebration of the Quebec cinema, was held yesterday.

I want to congratulate all the winners and mention the huge success of the films *J'ai tué ma mère*/*I Killed my Mother* and *Polytechnique*. These two movies reflect the new generation of Quebec creators, who are inspired by the province's rich cinematographic heritage, while also showing daring, humanism and sensitivity. Because of this, they have earned tremendous recognition, both at home and abroad.

With their ambition and ability to succeed at the international level, without compromising the quality of their art, they are to a credit to Quebec's creators, artists and artisans. When Quebec shines at the world level, all of Canada also shines with it.

On behalf of the Liberal Party, I want to reiterate our support to Quebec artists, and to congratulate all the winners and nominees at the 12th Jutra awards gala.

I am going to conclude by asking the Conservative government to pay greater attention to Quebec culture. It is a hotbed of innovation and deserves the government's support.

*Statements by Members***SAGUENAY FJORD**

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean and Upper North Shore regions can boast about an absolutely spectacular natural site, namely the Saguenay fjord. This old glacial valley has historic value and an amazing variety of wildlife that make the locals very proud.

I asked Dr. Jules Dufour, professor emeritus at UQAC, to assess the possibility of getting the Saguenay fjord on UNESCO's world heritage list. He came to the conclusion that the Saguenay fjord has everything it needs to obtain international recognition at UNESCO.

The hon. member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord and myself are going to do all we can to convince the Canadian government to put that site on its 2014 indicative list. The recognition of the Saguenay fjord by UNESCO is an ambitious and promising project.

* * *

[English]

ORGANIZED CRIME

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, western provinces are taking action to fight organized crime. Alberta and Manitoba have just introduced legislation to prohibit body armour. In Manitoba's case, it also includes controls on fortified vehicles that have had armour and other security features added to make them more difficult for police to deal with. The controls being proposed allow legitimate use for security officials. In another move, Manitoba is amending legislation to allow justice officials to take civil action against gang properties and businesses in order to deny the criminals the incentive of income derived from crime.

While that is a civil law approach to challenging gang activity, the question being asked is why the federal Conservative government, with its supposedly tough on crime attitude, is not co-operating with the provinces to make the body armour and fortified vehicles restriction a Canada-wide effort under the Criminal Code.

Why does the Conservative government not take steps to take away profits from organized crime?

* * *

BOB MATHESON

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to commemorate the life of Mr. Bob Matheson, who passed away in November, just shy of his 90th birthday.

Bob led a truly extraordinary life, a life which he completely devoted to others: his family, his community and his country.

Mr. Matheson served in World War II with the Royal Canadian Air Force and he remained dedicated to our men and women in uniform for the rest of his life.

Bob was instrumental in helping to shape the city of Edmonton as an alderman from 1974 to 1977. He practised law for 50 years and served as president of the Edmonton Law Society.

Mr. Matheson was a leader in our community in making it safer. He helped establish the Edmonton Crime Stoppers program, for

which he received the Order of Canada in 1989, and was given the distinguished lifetime member designation of the Edmonton Police Service. As a conscientious taxpayer, he helped form and served as the president of the Alberta and the Canadian Taxpayers Federation.

Bob Matheson's life and achievements made our community a better place to live. I ask all parliamentarians to join me in recognizing this truly great Canadian.

* * *

● (1405)

RETIREMENT CONGRATULATIONS

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every night at 6 p.m. for nearly four decades, the people of eastern Ontario and western Quebec tuned in to the trusted local newscasts of Max Keeping. Their loyalty to him as a CJOH TV news anchor has only been surpassed by his loyalty to them as citizens of his beloved community.

And make no mistake, Max Keeping knew his community intimately, not just because of his 51 years as a local journalist, but because he made it his mission to give as much of himself to that community as humanly possible. It is estimated that Max has participated in the collection of more than \$100 million in charitable donations in the Ottawa area. He participated in about 200 community events and still does each year and every year.

On a personal note, I fondly recall Max's participation early one chilly December morning during the annual Media's Big Food Drive to help needy families.

I congratulate Max on his retirement as news anchor after 37 years. We will miss seeing his face on TV every night, but I know we will continue to see him at the community centres, the charity halls, the food banks, the hospitals and anywhere else he is needed.

* * *

BRANDON UNIVERSITY

Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Friday, March 19, I had the pleasure of welcoming the Prime Minister of Canada to Brandon, Manitoba. The Prime Minister announced our government's financial commitment for a new Brandon University healthy living centre. The centre will host gymnasiums and indoor track, training and treatment services, as well as a facility for fitness classes. Highly efficient, the building will use sustainable and recycled materials earning it "Certified LEED Silver" and both students and residents will have access to the health centre.

The announcement fulfills the dreams of so many who have poured countless time, effort and donations into this new facility and will now permit them to accomplish their goal in realizing a healthy living centre for Brandon University and all of western Manitoba.

Statements by Members

We are fortunate to have a Prime Minister and a government that understands that strong communities mean strong provinces and a strong country. For that, I thank the Prime Minister on behalf of the people of Brandon—Souris. For Brandon University, I say, “Let’s get it done. Go Bobcats”.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADIAN FREESTYLE SKI CHAMPIONSHIPS

Mr. Pascal-Pierre Paillé (Louis-Hébert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday there was a Quebec sweep in the women’s dual moguls at the Canadian Freestyle Ski Championships.

By the end of the event, the Dufour-Lapointe sisters from Montreal had taken all three places on the podium.

While the youngest, Justine, took the bronze medal and the eldest, Maxime, took the silver, the gold went to the middle sister, Chloé. It was her first-ever national seniors title.

Chloé had already proved her worth at the Olympic Games in Vancouver, taking fifth place in the moguls. She was also eighth in the final standings of the moguls World Cup.

It was a remarkable achievement for the Dufour-Lapointe sisters. My colleagues in the Bloc Québécois join with me in saluting their impressive performance and wishing them further success and happiness in their sport.

* * *

[English]

VIMY RIDGE DAY

Mr. Greg Kerr (West Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada’s contribution to the first world war helped define us as a nation and shaped the country in which we live today.

That is why on April 9, Vimy Ridge Day, Canadians will stand united in remembrance of and gratitude to those who authored one of the most important chapters in our nation’s history.

In addition to the national commemorative ceremony in Ottawa on April 9, there will be international ceremonies as well as activities in our provincial and territorial capitals to recognize all those who served Canada during the first world war.

We are also providing the opportunity for the public to pay their respects by signing special books of reflection, which will be on display at various locations across the country and overseas. These books of reflection will also be available online at the Veterans Affairs Canada website.

* * *

PROJECT HERO

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the efforts of Honorary Lieutenant-Colonel Kevin Reed for his tremendous exercise in citizenship in the establishment of Project Hero.

In honouring the sacrifice of Canadian men and women killed in military service, Project Hero not only remembers the past, but looks

to the future. By providing scholarships to children of fallen soldiers, Project Hero ensures their legacy will not only be captured in stone memorials and solemn commemorations, but will be a living legacy to the opportunities afforded their children by receiving higher education.

Mr. Reed and the colleges and universities that have joined in this fitting tribute deserve commendation from every Canadian who reaps the benefits of safety, democracy, human rights and dignity, those things the parents of these young adults fought to establish and preserve.

To the recent critics of the program, quite simply, they are wrong. To the founders of the program, we thank them for honouring our soldiers and recognizing the critical importance of higher education for the success of a nation.

* * *

● (1410)

LIBERAL PARTY CONFERENCE

Mr. Andrew Saxton (North Vancouver, CPC): Mr. Speaker, jobs and the economy are our government’s top priorities because they are the top priorities of Canadians. In year two of our economic action plan, we have protected the jobs of today while laying the groundwork to create the jobs of tomorrow. We have done so by keeping taxes low because we know that higher taxes kill jobs.

Yet, at the Liberal spenders conference held this weekend, every tax hike imaginable was discussed. On Friday, the Liberals called for the GST to be raised. On Saturday, the Liberals rallied once again around their job-killing carbon tax on everything. On Sunday, the Liberal leader announced that he would raise job-killing business taxes to pay for his reckless spending promises.

We know the Liberal leader is a self-described tax and spend Liberal, but raising taxes would kill jobs and stop our recovery dead in its tracks. This proves yet again that he is not in it for Canadians, he is only in it for himself.

* * *

UNION AND COMMUNITY ACTIVIST

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this weekend in Ottawa, a full house of admirers toasted longtime union and community activist Clarence Dungey on his 75th birthday. For most of his life, Clarence has been a champion of all things fair and just, including his time as Sault Ste. Marie labour council president.

Statements by Members

He has touched a lot of people, including my own family. For many years, a virtual picture of Clarence held a prominent place above our devout Catholic family's kitchen table, alongside a picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. That is because, among other things, my parents lived for the last 25 years of their lives on the pension Clarence negotiated for them.

Clarence knew the power of community working together for the common good. We should all be concerned today as we see unions come under attack in places like Sudbury and as governments look for ways to lower wages for workers and taxes for corporations.

Today I salute Clarence and all others like him across the country who support the right of workers to organize and fight for the dignity of all.

* * *

[*Translation*]

LIBERAL PARTY CONFERENCE

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the conference of Liberal Party big spenders is over. We naturally want to know what great, innovative ideas were hatched this weekend. Over three days, they suggested raising the GST to 7%, an idea that the Liberal leader did not reject. They proposed a carbon tax, an idea that the Liberal leader was the first to defend during his failed leadership race. They also suggested increasing business taxes in order to fund their grandiose spending programs.

This is only one more step in the Liberals' plans to raise fees and taxes. After 34 years out of Canada, the Liberal Party leader has returned with an ill-considered plan for tax increases. Tax increases will kill jobs, dampen our economic recovery, and be a backward step for Canadians.

The Liberal Party leader does not care about the Canadian taxpayer; all he cares about is himself.

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12TH JUTRA AWARDS GALA

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, all of Quebec honoured Quebec film at the Jutra awards ceremony, which I had the pleasure of attending at the TOHU in Montreal. Once again, we were blown away by the talent and creativity of the artists, as well as by the diversity and quality of the films.

It was obvious at this gala that a new generation of actors, producers and film professionals are re-energizing and renewing the creativity of the Quebec nation.

On behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I wish to extend sincere congratulations to the recipients. Thank you, Anne Dorval, Sébastien Ricard, Pierre Gill, Denis Villeneuve and Xavier Dolan. Thanks to all of you for the beautiful emotions.

I would like to repeat the message of the lifetime achievement award recipient, René Malo, who said that film funding has not increased in the past 10 years although budgets have doubled. He added that piracy is the cancer of our film industry and warrants a solid copyright law.

The support we give to the Quebec film industry must be equal to its talent.

* * *

LIBERAL PARTY CONFERENCE

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the past few months, thousands of Canadians participated in a national conversation on the Canada we want to see in 2017, on our 150th birthday.

This weekend, thousands of others participated in the "Canada at 150: Rising to the Challenge" conference.

● (1415)

[*English*]

In the last three days, we had more than 70 events across the country and more than 25,000 people participated via the Internet. Our panellists in Montreal took questions from Glace Bay, Fredericton, Whitehorse and all points in between. This was an exciting step forward for public policy, for citizen engagement, and for Canadian democracy.

I want to thank those who worked and took part this weekend. I invite all Canadians, including members of the House, to join us as we continue to make public policy in public. I also wish to thank my co-chairs, Dominique Anglade, Randy Boissonnault and Dr. Martha Piper, for their wonderful contribution.

* * *

LIBERAL PARTY CONFERENCE

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal leader's spenders conference has wrapped up and what are the big innovative ideas that came out of the weekend?

On Friday, there was a proposal to hike the GST back to 7%. On Saturday, there was a clear call to bring back a job-killing carbon tax on everything. On Sunday, what was the Liberal leader's next big idea? He called for job-killing business tax hikes to pay for big and grandiose Liberal spending programs.

The fact is that after being away for 34 years, the Liberal leader has come back to Canada with a reckless plan to raise as many taxes as he can, including the GST. These Liberal tax hikes will kill jobs, put the brakes on our economic recovery, and set Canadian families back.

The Liberal leader's tax hike plans once again prove that he is not in it for Canadians, he is only in it for himself.

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTIONS***[English]***TAXATION**

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this weekend we heard from thousands of Canadians and public policy leaders right across the country about the challenges that face us: an aging population, rising health care costs, slower economic growth, and a pension crisis that is already here.

Given these facts, we need to make some targeted investments to help our families, give our kids the skills they need, and pay down the deficit.

Given all these challenges, why is the Prime Minister rushing ahead with corporate tax cuts this country cannot afford?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party certainly had a taxing weekend. The Liberal Party has been very clear right from the get-go and it was very clear this weekend.

The Liberals want to raise taxes on everything. They want to raise the GST. They want to raise payroll taxes with their 45-day work year. Now they have come out and want to raise taxes on job creators and raise taxes on investment. That will not help job creation in Canada.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, only a Conservative would call pushing the pause button on corporate tax breaks a tax hike. It is just not so.

Already, Canada's corporate tax rate is exceedingly competitive. We are 25% more competitive than the United States already, thanks to good public policy by the member for Wascana. Corporate Canada needs much more than tax breaks to get competitive. It needs a skilled labour force and we need to make investments there now.

I repeat the question. Why is the government pushing ahead with corporate tax rate cuts this country cannot afford?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to answer that question very directly.

Our leader has stressed, in particular, the importance of deeper corporate tax cuts as a primary means of achieving the investment, the rising living standards and the jobs, jobs, jobs that we all want for ourselves and our children.

Do you know who said that, Mr. Speaker? It was the official spokesman on tax matters for the Liberal Party, the member for Markham—Unionville.

[Translation]

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff: Mr. Speaker, what are this party and this government offering as an alternative to the years of budget cuts and freezes, years without hope for Canadians? Instead, we could be investing in education and innovation. We could help our families, educate our children and bring down the deficit.

In light of this alternative, why is the Prime Minister pushing ahead with corporate tax rate cuts we can no longer afford?

● (1420)

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us be clear, between the Liberal vision and the Conservative vision our vision is for more jobs, more hope and more opportunity. It is for more investment in the Canadian economy.

Let me go further. Maybe the Liberal leader should have allowed his caucus to speak at the convention this weekend because if he had the member for Markham—Unionville would have likely said that the new Canadian advantage in the Liberal vision is to tell investors that if they invest in Canada, they will pay a whole lot less in corporate taxes. That is from the official spokesman for the Liberal Party of Canada. Let him speak.

* * *

*[Translation]***THE BUDGET**

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week, the government told us that we would be debating the budget bill today, but that is not the case. The government seems to be struggling to keep up with the minister's latest comments about the GST.

How many more flip-flops does the Minister of Finance intend to spring on taxpayers and capital markets?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is no change in the tax policy on GST with respect to financial services.

There were a couple of court cases late last year that obscured the definition and we clarified it in a couple of clarifying memos. The intention, as with the previous government, is to maintain the same definition of financial services.

Having said that, I want to thank the member for Markham—Unionville and his party for agreeing that we need to get to a \$17 billion deficit within two years. I thank them for adopting our government's policy with respect to that.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, talk about a pot calling a kettle black.

Only a Conservative could criticize a plan to delay corporate tax cuts until they are affordable while at the same time slamming small business with job-killing EI premium hikes.

Oral Questions

Under the minister's own plan, a small business with 10 workers will pay \$9,000 more for the privilege of keeping its employees.

Will the minister finally admit that his job-killing payroll tax hike will kill 200,000 Canadian jobs?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me try to understand the oxymoronically named thinkers conference.

They are going to increase business taxes on small and medium size businesses. The official opposition members are going to do that. They are going to raise the GST and they are going to impose a carbon tax on everybody, at a time that we are trying to come out of the great recession.

It is just shocking, the insensitivity of the Liberal Party, the tax and spend party, to the needs of Canadians, especially small business people in Canada.

* * *

[Translation]

TAXATION

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, for more than a year, the Conservative government has continually been asking taxpayers to tighten their belts. Now we learn that in the last budget the government opened a loophole to allow more corporations to take advantage of tax havens and avoid paying their fair share of taxes.

How can the government dare to ask taxpayers to make sacrifices while allowing some corporations to get away with paying no taxes on the sale of shares?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what the Bloc leader fails to say is that in the 2010 budget, we closed nearly 10 tax loopholes to ensure tax fairness for all Canadians.

We are working actively with our international partners to put an end to all tax havens, in particular by improving our agreements to share tax information with other countries and by devoting more of Revenue Canada's resources to tax audits. So the Bloc really should support the budget.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I just told him they are opening a new tax loophole and he has nothing to say in response.

I will give him another example. He told us the government is dealing with tax havens. At the same time, he wants to negotiate a free trade deal with Panama, which appears on the list of tax havens published by the OECD. How can they ask their fellow citizens to tighten their belts and at the same time sign a deal with a country that is on the OECD list of tax havens? I would like an answer this time.

• (1425)

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, he has his answer, namely, ten tax loopholes were closed. Instead of opposing the budget, he should stand and vote in favour of it.

The 2010 budget also makes changes that will enable Canadian companies to attract foreign capital. This will help us improve our

productivity and face the international competition. Such measures are obviously of no interest, though, to the Bloc Québécois.

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when it is time to grab money from the working class, the government does not waste any time. However, when it is time to make the rich pay, it drags its feet.

The Bloc Québécois has proposed and is still asking that the government put an end to tax evasion and tax havens, that it take away the gifts made to oil companies, and that it impose a surtax on those whose annual taxable income exceeds \$150,000.

Just why does the government not ask these privileged people to do their share in the fight against the deficit?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the situation is clear to me: 10 tax loopholes were eliminated by our government. I am saying it the way it should be said. I hope that this time they will understand. Ten tax loopholes were eliminated by our government.

The members across the way should stop opposing the budget. They should rise and support it. Then, they will see concrete results.

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is the fourth answer to the same question.

The Quebec government is going to table its budget this week, but the federal government refuses to pay it its due. There are \$8 billion that are dormant here in Ottawa, including \$800 million for post-secondary education, \$2.2 billion for harmonizing the sales tax, and \$1 billion for capping equalization payments.

What is the Government of Canada waiting for to pay its debt to the Quebec government?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we had one of the worst recessions since the 1930s. We were the last ones to enter into that recession and we will come out of it stronger. We never offloaded the deficit onto the provinces and municipalities.

We maintained our social and health transfers. Moreover, before that, we corrected the fiscal imbalance. As we can see, the economic action plan is working. Last Friday, I was in Stanstead with the Prime Minister, where we paid tribute to Pat Burns. An arena is being built there to help young people and to promote amateur sport.

This is action, not just empty rhetoric.

[English]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after bringing in the biggest corporate tax cuts in Canadian history, the Liberals have finally realized their mistake. They are now supporting the New Democratic Party call for a freeze on the corporate tax cuts on the big banks and oil companies. Sure, it is another Liberal flip-flop, but what Canadians really want to know is when the current government will understand that this is a reckless form of spending that is driving us further into debt and is increasing the deficit.

When will the government join the emerging consensus that these reckless corporate tax cuts are not the way to go and it must stop them?

Oral Questions

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my friend the leader of the New Democratic Party has made quite the conversion. It was not 15 months ago that he signed a coalition agreement to support each and every one of these tax cuts. He was prepared to serve in a government that saw jobs, hope and opportunity as the primary goals, and to do everything we can to ensure more investment in Canada, that we have a Canadian advantage that will allow jobs to come back to this great country. We believe that taxing investment, we believe that excessively taxing those who create jobs hurts the economy and leads to a lower standard of living. That is why we are moving forward with an aggressive job creation agenda.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, half the world now agrees with the Parliamentary Budget Officer. Even the minions of the leaders on Bay Street are saying that these across-the-board corporate tax cuts are not the way to go, that they are not efficient, they are not effective, they do not create jobs, they do not create investment. All they do is leave our finances in a more difficult position. The Governor of the Bank of Canada has come out with the same position.

When will the Conservatives take off their ideological blinders and recognize that these corporate tax cuts are reckless and they should be stopped?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal plan is to raise taxes on job creators, on Canadian business, on Canadian consumers, with the GST. It is very clear the Liberal Party wants to raise taxes on everything.

We strongly support competitive tax rates. We want Canada to be a bright light when it comes to new investment, so that there are more jobs, so that there is more opportunity. That is why this government's economic plan is working.

We have a fragile recovery setting in, and the worst thing that we could do would be to raise taxes, as the leader of the Liberal Party has argued.

• (1430)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what the Prime Minister does is borrow money to cut taxes for big businesses. Even these people are getting uncomfortable. They are saying enough is enough.

Why is the Prime Minister stubbornly sticking with his choices? Why increase employment taxes by \$19 billion, while reducing corporate taxes by \$60 billion? This does not make any sense.

[*English*]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me be very clear. It looks like the coalition that was going to see the Liberal leader be prime minister now has a new face. It is the face of the leader of the New Democratic Party, who now seems to be the puppeteer for the Liberal Party.

Let us be very clear. Let me quote another good senior economist:

I am very sympathetic to a lower corporate tax rate. I think it would get a big bang for the buck, in terms of stimulating growth and productivity and all of those good things.

If only the Liberal leader would have let the member for Markham—Unionville speak at his thinking, spending, taxing conference, maybe there would have been better policy.

* * *

HUMAN RESOURCES AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Siobhan Coady (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's Office recently warned political staff to stop meddling in access to information requests.

Two weeks later, the office of the Minister of Human Resources obstructed an information request about a \$5 million advertising campaign during the Olympics. The media had a simple question. Department officials had the answer. The minister's office intervened and hid the truth.

Is the minister embarrassed by the waste of taxpayers' money, or does she not believe that Canadians deserve the truth?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the reporter was provided with the information that he requested once the campaign was complete and all the costs were in and accurate.

We do strive always to be open and transparent. We certainly are doing our processes to ensure that Canadians do receive the information they ask for in a timely way and that that information is both accurate and complete. We will be taking a look at this example and taking it into consideration to see how we can improve our processes in the future.

Ms. Siobhan Coady (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was three weeks later. Either the Prime Minister was not sincere in his edict to ensure access to information or his minister is ignoring him.

There is a pattern of political interference in the denial of access to information requests by the Conservative government, so much so that the Information Commissioner is now investigating.

What new measures will the Prime Minister take to ensure access to information for Canadians, or is he where the problem begins?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, we always strive to be open and transparent, but we do want to make sure that when Canadians request information from us, the information they receive is timely and accurate, and it is important that it be complete. That is why we are going to use this example to see what lessons can be learned from it for the future.

* * *

AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about openness and transparency.

The torture documents that were dumped in Parliament last Thursday show that the government is actually concealing information from Parliament, not for national security but to protect itself from embarrassment. Torture is a stark reality in Afghan jails. The government is hiding the ugly truth about torture and who knew what and when.

When will the government stop trying to shield itself from embarrassment and call a public inquiry so that Canadians can learn the truth?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has it completely wrong, but it is good to see that they are back on message in the Liberal Party with their number one concern.

That being said, we put a process in place. We have appointed the hon. Justice Frank Iacobucci to have a look at the documents, to check this over. This is a process that should have the support of all hon. members. I am surprised that the hon. member is not supporting this process.

• (1435)

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the documents dumped in Parliament last week, there is at least one document that appears twice. In one instance, a paragraph is blacked out; in the other, it is not. Clearly this process is random, arbitrary and driven by the politics of cover-up.

When will Canadians learn who in government knew what and when? When will the government have the courage to be decent and honest and call a public inquiry?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member does not have confidence in the public servants who looked at these documents. These are individuals who have no other interests than public safety and the safety and security of the men and women who serve in Afghanistan, but we have gone beyond that and we have appointed Mr. Frank Iacobucci to have a look at these. This is a step in the right direction.

* * *

[Translation]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the G8 foreign affairs ministers will focus on the nuclear threat posed by Iran and North Korea. Canada is not very credible on this subject, given that it is more interested in selling its CANDU reactors than addressing security issues. Canada recently entered into an agreement with India, which has not signed the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

Does the minister realize that he might be able to speak with more authority if his government were more vigilant when it comes to nuclear non-proliferation?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question, but I must say one thing.

Oral Questions

[English]

Canada is committed to promoting international peace and security by working to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons. Canada's policy is rooted in its support of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

* * *

[Translation]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, while those living in the Arctic are wondering what their future holds, it is disappointing that three of the five members at the Arctic summit, including Canada, have not signed the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Should the government not begin by unconditionally signing this declaration and urging its partners to do likewise in order to come to a lasting agreement about the Arctic?

[English]

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas), CPC): Mr. Speaker, northerners do play a fundamental role in Canada's Arctic sovereignty strategy. The Minister of Foreign Affairs spoke with territorial leaders and leaders of Arctic indigenous organizations before the summit. Today's meeting is specifically for those states that share a coastline with the Arctic Ocean.

The Arctic Council chair and our Minister of Foreign Affairs will debrief other interested parties after the conference.

* * *

[Translation]

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāi Thi Lac (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees is afraid that two-tier triage for refugees according to their country of origin will penalize certain persecuted groups from countries that are deemed safe. Homosexuals and women could be the first victims of the Conservative government's proposed reform.

What measures will be put in place so that refugees who could suffer genital mutilation, forced marriage or persecution because of their sexual orientation are not deported?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her question.

Tomorrow, I will table a bill in the House that proposes balanced reforms of the asylum system. We want to improve this system in order to protect victims of persecution much more quickly and address the issue of unfounded refugee claims.

All the reforms will comply with our international legal obligations and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Everyone will be able to apply to the IRB for refugee status. The reforms will be balanced.

Oral Questions

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāi Thi Lac (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees says that the selection system must take claimants' individual circumstances into consideration. The appeal division, which has never been put in place by the Liberals or the Conservatives, would ensure that every case is examined on its own merits.

Does the minister understand that he needs to put in place a real appeal division, not some watered-down mechanism?

• (1440)

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is odd. For a year, I have been encouraging the opposition parties to come up with ways of carrying out balanced reforms and improving the asylum system. But we have not received any suggestions from the Bloc Québécois.

The reforms I am going to propose tomorrow will comply fully with all our legal and moral obligations. I just announced that as part of its reforms, Canada will accept 2,500 more refugees from around the world—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Lac-Saint-Louis.

* * *

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on World Water Day, the *National Post* ran an editorial advising Canada to leave the door open to bulk water exports. The editorial echoed the view of the Montreal Economic Institute, the right-wing think tank founded by the member for Beauce.

The previous Liberal government took major steps to protect Canada's freshwater from export, including amending the International Boundary Waters Treaty Act. Why has the Conservative government not acted in any way to protect against the possibility of future exports of this vital Canadian resource?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I welcome my hon. colleague back from the thinking, taxing and spending conference he took part in on the weekend. I am given to believe, from what I read in the newspaper, that when that many Liberals get together it is, undoubtedly, a taxing experience, and so it seems.

The hon. member knows that we are opposed to any bulk water exports, and our position on that is quite clear. There is an extensive layer of provincial regulations in place right now that deal with this issue. I would encourage my friend to be supportive of the government's efforts.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was at another conference this weekend, a conference calling on the federal government to bring in a national water strategy.

[Translation]

The Minister of the Environment is blowing with the wind. In its 2008 throne speech, the Conservative government promised to introduce a bill to prohibit major water diversions. The current provincial policies were already in place at the time, so the minister cannot use those policies as an excuse for his government's flip-flop.

Why is the Conservative government refusing to protect the national interest?

[English]

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I hope my hon. friend is not now proposing a tax on water. I know the Liberals would tax everything else that is possible.

Why did my hon. colleague not appear to be supportive this past weekend of the regulations that this government has brought in to deal with the discharge of municipal sewage into our natural water system? We have been pursuing these regulations for a generation in this country. They would apply to some 4,000 municipal waste water facilities across the country. I ask my hon. colleague to support these efforts.

* * *

CANADA PENSION PLAN

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we can now add former Bank of Canada governor, David Dodge, to the growing list of those calling for the creation of a supplemental Canada pension plan. Mr. Dodge and other experts know that if we fail to take action to fix the shortcomings of our pension system, seniors and governments will all pay a hefty price.

Despite the Prime Minister's long held view that the CPP should be abolished, will the Conservatives listen to the experts and immediately create a supplemental Canada pension plan to help Canadians prepare for retirement?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are differences of opinion with respect to how one can improve the Canada pension plan and how one can involve the private sector.

The member opposite and her party seem to think they have a monopoly on the only thing that will work. The Canadian Labour Congress does not agree with the Liberals. The Ontario Federation of Labour does not agree with them. I spoke with them in Toronto on Saturday and they have a rather different idea.

I suggest that the official opposition stops acting as if it has a monopoly on the truth.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are looking for action not more talk.

Sick and disabled Canadians urgently need changes to the bankruptcy act to salvage their benefits. That was proven in spades by a court decision this past weekend that left 12,000 Canadian pensioners, 400 long-term disability recipients and 7,000 other former Nortel employees completely vulnerable.

Will the government agree today to move by unanimous consent to amend the bankruptcy act to help these desperate sick Canadians?

Oral Questions

•(1445)

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member should be aware, this government is already reviewing the provisions of the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act. We are asking Canadians for their input as well through the process that the Minister of Finance has set up.

What we will not do is adopt the policies of the Liberals across the aisle based on their taxapalooza conference of the past weekend where they want to tax everything and anything. That is not good for pensioners, not good for seniors and not good for the people of Canada.

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at the Liberal spenders conference this past weekend, all the Liberals did was talk about higher taxes. They talked about a GST hike. They discussed reviving the carbon tax. They now have an official plan to raise job-killing business taxes.

Would the Minister of Finance tell the House how raising taxes harms Canada's economy.

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House we have a jobs and growth budget. Members on the other side of the House are proposing job-killing tax increases for Canadians.

I know the Liberals do not like listening to Canadians but perhaps they will listen to the Liberal finance critic who said that deeper business cuts are the “primary means of achieving the investment, the rising living standards and the jobs, jobs, jobs that we all want for ourselves and our children”.

The budget is pro-jobs. Raising taxes is against jobs. Canada needs jobs, especially our small and medium-sized businesses.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, veteran diplomat, Robert Fowler, described the Conservative government's foreign policy as “small-minded and mean-spirited”. He criticized Canada's declining participation in UN peacekeeping missions and our inaction in Africa.

Our absence from the Democratic Republic of Congo underscores Mr. Fowler's honest assessment. More than five million lives have been lost to violence in the Congo and mass rape is commonplace.

Will the government confirm reports that we will assist in the UN peacekeeping mission in the Congo?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas), CPC): Mr. Speaker, where the government does happen to agree with Robert Fowler when he says that “the Liberals don't stand for much in the way of principle and will endorse anything and everything which might return them to power”.

With regard to my colleague's question, the government is proud to stand with strong democracies and against those groups and states that embrace tyranny, hate and terror.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in 2003, Canada was asked to lead the peacekeeping mission in the Congo but we chose Kandahar instead. The conflict in the Congo has worsened since. Just this week, evidence of another massacre was discovered.

Canadian involvement in the Congo will require a multifaceted approach to support peacekeeping, to end the violence against women and involve them in peace-building and to stem the trade of conflict minerals that sustain these atrocities.

Will we learn from the mistakes of Rwanda and commit to supporting peace-building and peacekeeping in the Congo, yes or no?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all members can be extremely proud of the work being done by the men and women in uniform in Afghanistan, as they can be with the work they did in Haiti and the work in Africa in the past.

Currently I can tell my hon. friend that future deployments of the Canadian Forces will be decided upon by the government in consultation with our capabilities, of course, and with senior leadership in the Canadian Forces.

Until the year 2011, we know that the primary commitment to the world is to continue our work in Afghanistan.

* * *

[Translation]

AFGHANISTAN

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the documents pertaining to the torture of Afghan detainees were censored inconsistently. For example, details of a prisoner revolt were removed from one document but not from another. Apparently, the concept of security is malleable enough to enable the government to hide politically sensitive information.

To restore public confidence, will the government turn over all of the documents in their original form to the parliamentary committee so that it can start by reviewing them in camera?

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government has made a large number of documents available, most recently this past Thursday. The documents were disclosed for different purposes over an extended period of time. Despite the best efforts of those involved, there will occasionally be inconsistencies. However, we addressed those, and are taking it one step further with the appointment of Mr. Justice Iacobucci.

•(1450)

[Translation]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister, who likes to control everything, lacks credibility. If he is capable of making sure that information as harmless as the cost of government advertising during the Olympic Games is not made public, imagine what he can do when his government is accused of violating the Geneva convention.

Oral Questions

Does the government acknowledge that it has no credibility when it comes to transparency?

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government has made documents available. It is cooperating in every way, consistent, though, with public safety and national security.

We have made that very clear and the hon. member should support the process in place.

* * *

AGRICULTURE

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week the minister ignored the concerns of major farm organizations that called his agristability program a failure. Now, Canada's major farm paper, *The Western Producer*, in its editorial states:

Budget misses the mark in helping ag. sector.

It adds:

For the first time in 31 budgets, the March 4 version contained no additional money for agriculture.

With the livestock sector in crisis, why does the minister continue to ignore advice by and for farmers?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, working with the provinces and territories, we always put farmers first when we are building toward our new programs. We constantly look at the existing programs to ensure they are hitting the target and serving the best interests of farmers out there. We want to ensure they are bankable and predictable, and we are getting that job done.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth than the minister's words. Now, with the livestock sector in turmoil, the minister even failed to gain a new nickel in the budget. Worse, the minister's own plans and priority document shows major cuts. Business risk management, forecast spending through 2013 is slashed by \$1.4 billion.

How can any farmer in this country believe anything the minister has to say when his own department undercut his rhetoric that he just blew forth here a minute ago?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, discounting that rant, let me read a couple of quotations. Brad Wildeman, president of the Canadian Cattlemen's Association, said:

These measures address a real threat to the long term profitability of the Canadian cattle industry.

Jacques Laforge, president of Dairy Farmers of Canada, said:

The Government of Canada has really stepped up to the plate. This announcement confirms they heard dairy and beef producers' requests for assistance—

The Canadian Meat Council said:

Canada's meat processing industry praised the announcement in the 2010 Federal Budget of initiatives that will ensure a more competitive cattle sector.

They all get it. Why did that member not read that page?

HUMAN RESOURCES AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in opposition, the Conservatives promised to end the cover-ups and scandals that we saw from the Liberals. Now that they are in government, it is clear that they did not really mean it. Today, we hear that yet another Conservative political staff person blocked information from being released.

From the Afghanistan cover-up to expensive self-promoting ads, the government thwarts accountability, claiming all decisions about releasing documents are made by non-political public servants. If it is really hands-off, why are its fingerprints all over this censorship?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fact is that the reporter was given the information that he asked for once the advertising campaign was complete and the costs were known at that point.

We do make sure we make every effort to ensure that Canadians receive the information they ask for. We want that information to be complete, accurate and provided in a timely manner. We will be using this example to modify our procedures as we go forward.

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, access to information is about transparency and accountability, not sanitizing or covering up embarrassing facts. Conservative political staff have admitted that the PMO chastises ministers' offices when unfavourable information is released.

In light of that, will the Minister of Human Resources verify reports that her staff simply did "what ministers' offices are expected to do by the PMO", or will she follow the cabinet's past practice, deny responsibility and let the interference continue?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in response to a media call, not an ATI request, the reporter was provided with the information he asked for once the ad campaign was complete and all the costs were known. That was exactly what he asked for. We complied with that. We will be looking at this example to see if there are lessons to be learned going forward.

•(1455)

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is unacceptable to Canadians that unelected senators can hold terms of up to 45 years. Our Conservative government has always been committed to reforming the Senate. To that hopeful end, could the Minister of State for Democratic Reform update the House on the government's commitment to Senate reform?

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, we agree with Canadians that it is time that the Senate reflect the values of the 21st century. That is why, in our 2010 throne speech, we have outlined our plans to reform the Senate. They include non-renewable term limits and a direct input for Canadians into who will become their senators in the future. It is time that the opposition parties get on board with our reforms.

* * *

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on April 9, we will mark the end of an era, remembering the passing of John Babcock and paying tribute to his comrades who gave their lives in World War I. Veterans who came home in 1918 were welcomed back as heroes. They built the Canada we know today.

Modern veterans face huge and new challenges. They want a part in building tomorrow's Canada, but the Conservatives are failing them.

When will the government commit to the care and benefits these soldiers deserve and are calling for themselves?

[Translation]

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his sensitivity to this issue.

I would remind the House that a number of events will take place over the next two weeks to honour the contributions of those involved in the first world war. As we know, 650,000 Canadians and Newfoundlanders were involved in the war, and 68,000 of them paid the ultimate price by giving their lives.

A special event is scheduled for April 9. A commemorative ceremony will take place at the National War Memorial here in Ottawa. All Canadians are invited to share their thoughts by signing the Book of Reflection over the next few days.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, if transitional measures for unemployed people in eastern Quebec are not renewed by April 10, those workers will have to work two weeks longer to be entitled to three fewer weeks of EI benefits.

Can the government confirm that it will renew the transitional measures in order to avoid prolonging the spring gap for the unemployed in eastern Quebec?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I understand

Oral Questions

the Bloc Québécois member's concerns about this and, I must say, this is a very important issue for everyone from Quebec. It is very important for the cabinet as well.

As I was saying, we are currently looking into the matter. Of course we are talking about the Lower St. Lawrence and North Shore regions. This includes workers and people from the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean region. I ask the hon. member to be patient. We would like to conduct the best possible analysis.

* * *

[English]

PENSIONS

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Nortel workers now have a gun to their heads. A judge ruled the February deal on extending health and disability benefits could not be approved because a clause would allow pensioners to argue for a higher priority if the government changed bankruptcy laws.

Nearly 20,000 pensioners have three days to decide whether to accept the deal without the protection of future legislative changes or lose everything.

Will the minister act immediately and use the NDP bill, Bill C-501, to change these unjust bankruptcy laws now?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have an obligation to review this bill in the best interests of Canadians. That is precisely what the Minister of Finance announced, I believe, last week. We are consulting with Canadians and will get back to the chamber at the earliest opportunity.

* * *

[Translation]

VETERANS

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada's contribution to World War I helped define us as a nation and shape the country we live in today.

•(1500)

[English]

On April 9 Canadians will mark the end of an era.

Could the Minister of Veterans Affairs enlarge on his recent comments in the House and tell us what our government is doing to commemorate the sacrifices made by our first world war veterans?

[Translation]

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for again raising this important matter.

Routine Proceedings

We know that 68,000 Canadians and Newfoundlanders lost their lives in World War I and that the last Canadian known to have served in that war has passed away. I am talking about John Babcock.

In the next two weeks, there will be a number of events to underscore the significance of what happened. The values of democracy and freedom drove those who fought during World War I to give us a better life.

On April 9, a large commemorative event will be held in their honour.

[English]

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will give the minister another chance.

[Translation]

Men and women are returning from Afghanistan with serious injuries and this government offers platitudes and hollow symbols.

The throne speech and the budget are not rooted in reality. These veterans are asking for changes to lump-sum disability payments.

Does this government have a single new initiative for these brave veterans?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to reiterate that the ombudsman is also reviewing this matter.

I will remind the member of the importance of giving the right message. Not only do veterans receive a lump-sum payment—they are not left to their own devices with just this amount—but they attend a rehabilitation program and receive 75% of their salary until they reintegrate into civilian life and find employment with a comparable salary. That is what we are doing.

The two measures are linked. I am not indifferent to their plight. We are currently examining this issue to see what people do with their lump sum payment.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

JOBS AND ECONOMIC GROWTH ACT

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-9, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 4, 2010 and other measures.

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

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CONSTITUTION ACT, 2010 (SENATE TERM LIMITS)

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-10, An Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867 (Senate term limits).

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

[Translation]

FIRST WORLD WAR VETERANS

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the passing of John “Jack” Babcock, Canada’s last known veteran of the first world war, in February reminded us of one of the most important chapters in our nation’s history and reinforced our duty to remember those who served.

When war broke out in Europe, an astonishing number of young Canadians took up the fight for freedom on distant shores.

[English]

Between 1914 and 1918 an entire generation of Canada’s finest saw a threat to basic human rights. They volunteered to meet it and they defeated it in a magnificent and uniquely Canadian way.

[Translation]

More than 650,000 Canadians and Newfoundlanders served alongside allied forces—fighting to protect the peace and freedom we enjoy today. Of those, more than 68,000 gave their lives and another 170,000 would be wounded. They were innovative and independent. Nothing was impossible.

• (1505)

[English]

Battling trench foot and shell shock, they led the events that captured Vimy Ridge 93 years ago this Friday, April 9. The victory at Vimy Ridge is considered Canada’s coming of age as a nation.

Despite suffering the difficult hardships of trench warfare, they survived the horrors of Ypres and Passchendaele.

[Translation]

And despite the fact that casualties sometimes numbered in the thousands in a single day, their ideals and beliefs spurred them on so that they could later build a nation that is strong, free and proud.

They propelled Canada onto the international stage. They were known around the world for their unparalleled contributions and accomplishments during the war effort.

[English]

Winston Churchill once said:

Courage is the first of human qualities because it is the quality which guarantees all others.

The courage of this generation of Canadians guaranteed not only those other human qualities but also shaped the spirit of our great nation.

After the war, they came home, married and raised families. The started businesses. They returned to fields and forest, to factories and mines. These extraordinary Canadians returned to their daily lives and built a great country.

Routine Proceedings

Their sense of duty and service laid the foundation for which Canadians have become known around the world. They changed the lives of a generation of Canadians and the lives of generations to come. Our economy progressed and grew. Our social fabric evolved and our population became more multicultural thanks to this generation.

They gave Canadians a stronger sense of national identity and pride.

[*Translation*]

Their personal sacrifice led to the greater good of humankind and gave this country the beginnings of the cohesive, modern military we have today. And although we mourn the passing of the last living link to this generation, we must take a moment for reflection and then look forward.

Nearly a century after the First World War ended, Canada is a strong and vigorous nation.

[*English*]

It is the duty of all Canadians to appreciate, really and truly appreciate, the freedoms we are blessed with today.

[*Translation*]

Today, together with the Prime Minister, I had the opportunity to sign the Book of Reflection in a tribute to the men and women who played a role in the Great War, and add these few words, "In homage to the 68,000 Canadians and Newfoundlanders who made the ultimate sacrifice of their lives so that we might live to see better days."

These books are located in many areas of the country for Canadians to sign, as well. They are part of a larger commemoration that honours and remembers those who have gone before us. On April 9—Vimy Ridge Day—commemorative services will be held at the National War Memorial here in Ottawa, as well as in many cities across Canada. These ceremonies offer Canadians the opportunity to take a moment and salute all those who died in service to this country so that we may enjoy the values of a democratic society.

Let us not forget that freedom must not be taken for granted. It is still under threat. One only need watch the evening news to know that conflict continues around the world and that, in every instance, freedom is threatened.

[*English*]

It is my sincere hope that our citizens mark this important milestone in this nation's continuing history and heritage by signing a book of reflection.

[*Translation*]

That is the very best tribute we could ever pay to what I would call "Canada's greatest generation." I say to my colleagues on both sides of the House of Commons today, that I am very proud to be part of a Canada that remembers the First World War.

• (1510)

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we heartily welcome the government's intention to mark the passing of

John Babcock, the last known veteran of the first world war, with a tribute to all those noble Canadian men and women who gave their lives either for a time or for eternity during the Great War.

On April 9, long known as Vimy Ridge Day, we will gather in our nation's capital and in cities across the country to pause in remembrance. This remembrance and every future remembrance of the first world war, the war that shaped both the Canadian Forces for a generation and our country for a century, will be different now that Mr. Babcock is no longer a living reminder of the sense of duty and the call to sacrifice that shaped his generation. Yes, it will be different, but as member of the House knows, remember we must. We remember for several reasons.

The sheer magnitude of the effort staggers the mind. Over 650,000 Canadians and Newfoundlanders, mostly men, volunteered for service. With a population of only eight million people, this represents close to 20% of the male population. One in five or six men were overseas fighting for the freedom, the dignity and the peace that we enjoy in our country today.

There was not a village, a town or a city unaffected by this wartime effort. Of these, almost 70,000 were killed in action, their bodies buried in foreign soil. Over 170,000 were wounded in body, all were wounded in spirit. A generation was changed and would never again take for granted the cost of peace and we must never forget.

We remember not only because of the numbers of men and women killed in service. We remember also because of the nature of that war effort and the challenge it offered this young country of ours. We remember because of the maturity with which that challenge was met.

It is not trite to say that the efforts of the first world war were efforts that shaped not only our military but our place in the world. Young Canadian soldiers and their officers became known for their courage, their fortitude, their dogged tenacity. This was a war of direct and personal consequence for the soldiers who fought for Canada. While comrades fell to their left and their right, our forces soldiered on.

Our efforts in the first world war informed our contributions in the second, in Korea, in the Cold War, in peacekeeping operations, in failed state initiatives and they continued to inform and inspire our soldiers in Afghanistan today.

This is the reputation of our military forces that endures to this day, both in conflict and in disaster relief, such as in our recent operations coordinating and delivering aid in Haiti. It is why we are valued partners in multilateral bodies minding borders, patrolling hillside and city streets in areas of conflict. It is why we continue to be acknowledged as a small but significant armed force, bringing our intelligence, our strength and our compassion to the military work in this country and around the world.

Routine Proceedings

With the minister, I encourage all members to sign the Book of Reflection. As we cast our minds to those we might forget in the past, we also cast them to the future, remembering new veterans who will be coming home in the days, weeks, months and years ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, by the time the roar of the machine-guns had died away, this war was known as the war to end all wars. We rise in the House today to commemorate the 93rd anniversary of the battle of Vimy Ridge.

Previously, the French and British had tried in vain to conquer what was called the ridge of death. But where the French and British failed, Canadians and Quebeckers succeeded. Between April 9 and 12, 1917, they mounted the ridge and conquered it in the face of 20,000 German soldiers, who pounded them with fire throughout the three long days of battle. It was a great honour to have succeeded in such an exploit.

Many did not survive, though, despite their courage. Of the 30,000 Canadians and Quebeckers who ascended that ridge of death, 7,000 were killed, or nearly 25% of the total. It was an enormous sacrifice. Sadly, these 7,000 soldiers did not live to taste victory.

These Canadians and Quebeckers were among 619,000 of their fellow citizens who fought in the first world war. Of these 619,000 Canadians and Quebeckers, 66,000 never returned to this side of the Atlantic.

It was the veterans who called it the war to end all wars. This was a heartfelt call to the ensuing generations, warning them against the folly of war, which brings only death and destruction. It is a cry we should never forget—never again.

The war traumatized all those who took part. They thought it would be a snap and it would be over in a few days. But the war bogged down and the armies faced each other in a new kind of war, called trench warfare or a continuous front.

It was an absolutely horrible experience. Thousands of men went to the front to end up in a trench a few metres away from an enemy trench. Historians say they did not fight very much but died a lot. Men who emerged from their trenches were killed on the spot. Their living conditions were worse than dreadful.

The soldiers in the trenches were called tommies, doughboys, poilus or G.I.s. Their lives consisted of hunger, fear, thirst, rats, mud and worst of all, a terrible new weapon that had just been invented, gas, which killed many thousands. That is what their daily lives consisted of and they could remain there for weeks under appallingly unhygienic conditions.

Never again barbed wire under the feet instead of grass. Never again families in tears, torn apart forever by the loss of a loved one to bombs, machine-guns or bayonets. Warfare was quite barbarous at the time.

Our soldiers may have fought with courage and valour and have been on the side of the victorious allies, but the first world war was nonetheless a great human tragedy. We have a duty to remember those who gave their lives so that we can live in peace and enjoy freedom.

Freedom does not always come easy, and at that moment in time, people had to fight to achieve freedom. That is what these individuals did, and it would be terribly ungrateful of us to forget that.

That is why we are pleased to see this appeal being made to the House today. I, too, urge all my colleagues to go and sign the Book of Reflection.

After the horrors of the 1914-18 war, a moral imperative emerged, which seeded in many the desire to achieve peace through means other than war. Countries got together to create the League of Nations, the forerunner of the United Nations.

Out of these four nightmarish years of war came a breakthrough. Now we try to the bitter end to avoid war through diplomacy, talks and agreements. That was not possible before. Indeed, it is a positive outcome of that war.

• (1515)

Another outcome was the end of empires. Empires had to go so that legitimate democracies could be created. The attention of nations was called to these issues and, as a result, we at least have these forums now to discuss amongst ourselves.

So, we say, may the people forever have the freedom to decide their future, may nation-states forever be free, sovereign and independent.

Finally, my gratitude goes to those who made the ultimate sacrifice so that we could enjoy such freedom and democracy today.

I will conclude the way I always do, “At the going down of the sun and in the morning, we will remember them.”

• (1520)

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we thank the hon. minister and the government for recognizing April 9 and for honouring the motion that was passed unanimously in this House to have a commemoration on April 9 for the last World War I veteran who, unfortunately, passed away.

As we all know, the great Mr. Babcock passed away in February of this year at the young age of 109, which is absolutely remarkable. There is a saying in military and historical collections that a mission never ends until the last person who serves that mission has passed away. The visual mission has ended but now the remembering begins.

It is our collective responsibility to ensure that not only this Parliament but our Senate and collective legislatures across the country, in the provinces and territories, working with schools and various veterans' organizations, ensure that what those brave men and women did on the battlefields during World War I is never lost in the memory of all of us and those who will follow us in the years to come.

Routine Proceedings

It is our collective responsibility to ensure that we never forget what Mr. Babcock did and 650,000 other Canadians have done. We also must ensure that we never forget the war effort at home where millions of Canadians collectively sacrificed, through food rationing and a variety of other programs, to ensure the war effort went well.

World War I and Vimy Ridge gave birth to our nation but many people forget that World War I also gave birth to another nation, the Blue Puttees of Newfoundland and Labrador. We also must not forget the sacrifice of the St. John's trench when more than 800 soldiers went over the top in 1916 and less than, I believe, 40 answered the roll call the following day. That gave rise and recognition to the Dominion in Newfoundland and Labrador of what a great nation that small island country was, along with Labrador and we consider their population and sacrifice and the fact that in 1949 we were given permission to join Newfoundland and Labrador to make it an even greater country.

This is the sacrifice and the unbelievable tenacity of these people. Can anyone imagine being like Mr. Babcock and lying about our age in order to go overseas and fight an enemy we do not know very much about?

On a gravesite in Passchendaele it states very clearly, "My son left his home so that you can live in yours". On another World War II gravesite, it states, "He gave the greatest gift that anyone can give and that is an unfinished life".

Our business is not finished, which is why I encourage, as others have, all members of Parliament, their staff and any visitors who come into the House of Commons to sign the Book of Remembrance in the great Hall of Honour, as well as legislatures across the country. We encourage all Canadians to take a moment out to sign the book and reflect for just one moment on the great sacrifice that so many Canadians made for us.

If we do that, then quite possibly we will be able to educate our children and their children on the great sacrifices that all Canadians have made. For those of us not born in Canada, we have always believed that Canada is one of the greatest countries in the world. However, that country was built and it was bred and it was done on the sacrifice and the blood of so many who went before us.

We are very pleased that on April 9 there will be a national commemoration ceremony across the country. We in the NDP and many of our colleagues across the country will be participating from coast to coast to coast. As we say in the Legions:

At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.

May God bless their memory.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

SCRUTINY OF REGULATIONS

Mr. Andrew Kania (Brampton West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Joint Committee on Scrutiny of Regulations.

●(1525)

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the following reports of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts: First, "Following up on Recommendations made by the Standing Committee on Public Accounts in the 39th Parliament, 2nd Session"; second, Chapter 2, The Governor in Council Appointment Process of the 2009 Status Report of the Auditor General of Canada; and third, Chapter 7, Special Examinations of Crown Corporations—2008 of the Spring 2009 Report of the Auditor General of Canada.

Pursuant to Standing Order 109 of the House of Commons the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to the second and third reports only.

* * *

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE ACT

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.) moved, seconded by the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan, for leave to introduce Bill C-503, An Act to amend the Department of Justice Act and make consequential amendments to another Act (aboriginal or treaty rights).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan for seconding my bill. She is known as a very knowledgeable and highly respected member of the aboriginal affairs committee. I want to express my gratitude for the fact that she was prepared to support a bill from someone from another political party.

The bill would require that all draft bills and regulations be reviewed prior to their presentation to ensure they do not abrogate from the protection provided for existing aboriginal or treaty rights as affirmed by section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982, and that any such inconsistency be reported to the House.

I had the good fortune of being a member of that committee for a year. I have learned that there is a need to have an overarching review of some of the legislation that comes forward to ensure we do not abrogate from treaty rights and aboriginal rights.

A couple of years ago I had the good fortune of introducing a bill to create a national cemetery, which was also supported by members from other parties. At the time, I offered the government to make it its own, should it so wish and I wish to reiterate that offer. If the government believes that it can support and introduce the legislation I have, I would be quite prepared to have the government make it its own so that it can become law sooner rather than later.

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

* * *

PETITIONS

LIMOUSINE SERVICE

Mr. Devinder Shory (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition on behalf of more than 330 of my constituents and other residents of Calgary.

Routine Proceedings

The petitioners call upon the House to protect the livelihood of hundreds of families and the consumers' choice against the Calgary Airport Authority's exclusive contract for limousine service awarded to a single company. It takes away employment from hundreds of limo operators in Calgary and also kills healthy competition in the market.

I am pleased to present this petition and the signatures are affixed on the back.

RESIDENTIAL WOOD BURNING

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition signed by hundreds of citizens from across the country calling on the government to restrict residential wood burning.

The petitioners note that the health hazards from wood smoke are well documented and that black carbon emitted by wood burning is a major contributor to climate change. Wood-burning fireplaces and stoves can emit hundreds of times more pollution than natural gas or electric heating and wood smoke poses very serious health risks to those suffering from asthma or other respiratory illnesses.

My constituents, Vicki Morell and her husband Dan, are working passionately on these issues.

The petitioners call on the government to restrict residential wood burning in all areas except where no other heat source is available. They call for financial assistance to those who are unable to pay for an alternative heat source and for a national campaign to educate Canadians about the health hazards of residential wood burning.

I am honoured to speak to this issue and I respectfully request that the government give full consideration to petitioners' views.

•(1530)

KAIROS

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions. The first one concerns the government's cuts to the organization KAIROS. The petitioners are very upset and state that they, the undersigned Church of Religious Community members, express their grave concern with this decision and ask that the Government of Canada reverse the decision, restore KAIROS' long-standing relationship with CIDA and reinstate its funding.

ANIMAL WELFARE

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is in support of a universal declaration of animal welfare. As there is scientific consensus and public acknowledgement that animals can feel pain and can suffer, all efforts should be made to prevent animal cruelty and reduce animal suffering. This is with the transportation of animals. They are petitioning the Government of Canada to support the universal declaration on animal welfare.

AIR PASSENGERS' BILL OF RIGHTS

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present today. The first one is from thousands of Canadians who are calling upon Parliament to adopt Canada's first air passengers' bill of rights. Bill C-310 would compensate air

passengers with all Canadian carriers, including charters, anywhere they fly in the world. The bill would provide compensation for overbooked flights, cancelled flights and long tarmac delays. It addresses late and misplaced baggage. It requires all-inclusive pricing by airlines when they advertise. The airlines would need to inform the passengers of flight changes, either delays or cancellations. The new rules would need to be posted at the airport. Airlines would need to inform passengers of their rights and the process to file for compensation.

The legislation has been in effect for five years in Europe. The question is: Why should a passenger flying with Air Canada get better treatment in Europe than in Canada? If the airlines follow the rules, it will not cost them anything.

The petitioners call upon the government to support Bill C-310, which would introduce Canada's first air passengers' bill of rights.

EARTHQUAKE IN CHILE

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is a call from Canadians for the government to match funds personally donated by citizens of Canada for the victims of the earthquake in Chile.

As members know, on February 27 an 8.8 magnitude earthquake occurred in southern Chile and the community in Canada has been raising funds. Two big social events have happened in Winnipeg over the last several weeks.

The people are calling upon the Prime Minister to give the same treatment to the earthquake victims in Chile as he did for the earthquake victims in Haiti and match funds personally donated by Canadians to help the earthquake victims in Chile.

STE. ANNE'S HOSPITAL

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there has been a great deal of talk about the potential transfer of the Ste. Anne's veterans Hospital, the last federally owned and operated hospital in Canada, to provincial government authorities. This has caused a great deal of worry and consternation among many of my constituents, veterans, spouses of veterans and children of veterans.

Therefore, I have been given a petition by some constituents who would like the Ste. Anne's veterans Hospital to remain under the care and administration of Veterans Affairs Canada so that all veterans who have proudly served Canada can be cared for among their comrades at the Ste. Anne's veterans Hospital where they would receive expert care in their time of need.

CRIMINAL CODE

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present thousands of petitions that have been signed by my constituents in regard to Bill C-384.

They state that assisted suicide and euthanasia pose a threat to society's most vulnerable and that the bill would allow any medical practitioner to assist in death. It also would require only the appearance of lucidity for consent of death and does not call for a concrete determination of actual lucidity.

Therefore, the petitioners call upon the House of Commons to vote against Bill C-384.

I am very pleased to table this petition along with my full support.

The Speaker: I do not know whether the hon. member was suggesting she was tabling her support but she knows that she is not to refer, in presentation of petitions, to whether she supports or opposes the petition. Presentation is one thing but the rules are there and the hon. member is well aware of it. In any event, I guess it is tabled.

* * *

•(1535)

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed:

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY DEBATE

ABORIGINAL HEALING FOUNDATION

The Speaker: The Chair has received an application for an emergency debate from the hon. member for Churchill and I will hear her now in her submissions on this point.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am rising today to request an emergency debate on the imminent cut of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. This debate is urgent given that the Aboriginal Healing Foundation is scheduled to lose all of its funding in two days, on March 31. This means the closure of 134 programs in every province and territory across Canada. It means the loss of vital programming for residential school survivors, their families and their communities.

The Aboriginal Healing Foundation has given healing and hope to survivors, their families and their communities for 10 years, but the need for healing is not over. The Aboriginal Healing Foundation is a central part of the legacy of the national apology that was given by the government and by Canada to residential school survivors. It is a key part of Canada's commitment to reconciliation. The loss of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation is a crisis and must be debated in the House.

I would like to ask you, Mr. Speaker, to grant this debate today or tomorrow, whatever is at your discretion.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for her submissions on this point. I have reviewed her letter on the matter and the submissions that she has made and I am inclined to grant the request for an emergency debate, but I will defer it until tomorrow evening if that is satisfactory.

Points of Order

I wish to inform the House that because of the ministerial statement, government orders will be extended by 21 minutes.

The hon. member for Ottawa—Orléans has a point of order I believe he wants to make submissions on. I will hear him now.

* * *

[*Translation*]

POINTS OF ORDER

REFERENCES TO MEMBERS OR MINISTERS

Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not request the floor with a light heart today. Of course you know that I do not call a lot of attention to myself in these precincts. I listen carefully to the debates. I speak only rarely and I avoid partisan ideology at all costs. When I sat in the chair in the 39th Parliament, I learned to fade into the background: as St. Anthony the Great said, “Discretion is the mother of all virtues.”

[*English*]

In *Henry IV*, Shakespeare wrote, “The better part of valour is discretion”.

[*Translation*]

Nevertheless, a member opposite has found reason to level criticism at me, criticism that he considers serious. On Wednesday, March 24, the member for Jolietterose on a point of order against me. His accusation is in Hansard, at page 879.

The House Leader of the Bloc Québécois informed the House that on several occasions, namely, on March 11, 12, 18 and 19, I reported on the social networking site Twitter the exact number of members of each party present in the House, mentioning the names of some members who were absent or present. He said that this situation had been troubling him a great deal. I must say that he never shared his distress with me.

He pointed out that there is a rule that during speeches in the House, members may not allude to the presence or absence of a member or minister in the House. He explained that this rule can be found on page 614 of the O'Brien and Bosc book on procedure. Because I have only a fraction of his experience here, I am grateful for the reference the member provided to us.

Nevertheless, he should have continued reading, because the next paragraph on the same page states, in black and white: “The Speaker has no authority to rule on statements made outside the House.”

The social networking site Twitter is in fact outside the House. I must admit that I use that site on occasion. However, I am very careful not to share privileged information there or anywhere else. The member for Joliette claims that this is precisely what I did, using “new technology”. He is mistaken.

Points of Order

First, that information is not privileged. Second, my statements were made outside the House. I respectfully submit that the presence or absence of members on the benches is not a state secret and that, notwithstanding the allegations by my colleague opposite, it is not even privileged information. There are nine television cameras here that are on at all times and that very effectively reveal the presence of members and also the presence of empty seats. There was a time when this television technology was new to the House. It dates from the 30th Parliament in 1976.

I would note in passing that members at that time resisted the installation of that technology for a long time. The Canadian parliamentary system is not new. It dates from 1791. For 219 years, our deliberative assemblies have been open to the public. We had the public galleries for 185 years before the advent of cameras. The gallery opposite the chair was once the ladies' gallery. The gentlemen were allowed into it provided they wore jackets and ties. The gallery above the chair was open to all members of the public, regardless of dress—workers, anyone at all.

Now, our galleries welcome hundreds of spectators every day. The galleries all around this chamber can seat 556 Canadian taxpayers or foreign visitors. All of them can see who is present or absent, and watch our proceedings and behaviour. Each day, thousands of visitors file in and out of the galleries.

• (1540)

[*English*]

One of the galleries above the Chair is designated as the “Press Gallery”. It includes 74 desks where journalists observe first-hand our presence or absence and our behaviour as well and they often report on it. No secrets there. By the way, none of those 74 seats is occupied right now.

[*Translation*]

I mentioned *Hansard* earlier. This official report of proceedings was instituted in 1875. It records the stands taken by each member whenever a vote is taken, thereby indicating who was present or absent. It has been that way for 135 years. But for 84 years before 1875, our predecessors resisted this new technology.

[*English*]

Now let us look at the hon. member's specific complaints. He refers to my messages of March 11. Every fact reported on those messages was clearly visible to any Canadian watching question period and our debates on the parliamentary television channel, CPAC. They were also experienced by any and all of the 74 journalists in the press gallery and to each of the 556 visitors in the public galleries. No state secrets here. No privileged information.

[*Translation*]

The same is true of the March 12 messages. No privileged information was disclosed, not even the colour of the members' ties. Any knowledgeable observer could notice the same things from the public galleries or from home.

[*English*]

The same is true for the observations of March 18.

[*Translation*]

The same is true where March 19 is concerned, except this was the first time the secessionist forces' bigwigs took note of my messages because, this time, they felt they were under attack. They are the ones who were absent, the whole bloc of them. They probably decided to do their resistance work elsewhere that particular day. Their protestations are certainly not disinterested.

[*English*]

The hon. member presented no evidence that the public information that was shared via Twitter was initiated from this floor or from the gallery and his claim that the information is privileged is not just flawed, it is erroneous.

His complaint borders on mischief. His attempt to censure me is itself a contempt on free speech.

[*Translation*]

This is not the first time that a secessionist member has attempted to muzzle me. Indeed, on January 28, 2009, during the second session of the 40th Parliament, the hon. member for Montcalm hurled invectives at me, including this one: “You, shut up.”

• (1545)

[*English*]

He barked, “You, shut up”.

[*Translation*]

He was that rude in his display of contempt and intolerance.

It is true that I do not share the restrictive ideology of those who want to rip apart the territorial integrity of the best country in the world. However, I will continue to defend all the democratic rights of those who do not share my point of view. This freedom of expression is what makes Canada the envy of the world.

I remember a great parliamentarian with whom I worked during the 37th Parliament and with whom I sat during the 39th Parliament. I will always have fond memories of the late Benoît Sauvageau. Despite our fundamental disagreements, we worked together to develop the language and the culture that we shared, and which I continue to defend, as my ancestors in Ontario have done since we left Mascouche, in Lower Canada, 175 years ago. Whether the members opposite like it or not, we are Ontarians, not good-for-nothings.

[*English*]

In the second session of the 39th Parliament, the member for London—Fanshawe made an excited statement showing her faulty assessment of the behaviour of the hon. member for Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam. What had trapped her into jumping to embarrassing conclusions was her target's use of a laptop computer, a relatively new technology in this chamber. In response to her utterances, you said, Mr. Speaker:

I have to say that whatever is being talked about does not strike me as being a point of order. The House some time ago allowed members to bring computers into the House. What appears on the screens of computers is not under the control of the Chair. I would suggest that if members have concerns about this, they raise it with the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. If it wants to pass a rule saying computers are not allowed in the House, it can do so.

Government Orders

We have not heard about this subject since. Computers are allowed in this place, and so is the dreaded BlackBerry.

I would like to draw your attention, Mr. Speaker, to a photograph of the second session of the 40th Parliament. This photo is of all of us, published by the Library of Parliament. It was taken by Roy Grogan, as a matter of fact. Half of the members are focused on the BlackBerrys in their hands. Are they sharing privileged information with the outside world? I doubt it. This place has no secrets.

Each day in the House we face a variety of challenges. Each time I think of my father. The late René Galipeau was a humble mechanic. Unlike many of us, he had no pretensions of wisdom, but his moral compass was most reliable.

[Translation]

As a good businessman and like any good father, he managed to overcome a number of challenges.

[English]

The quest for eloquence never was one of his personal ambitions.

[Translation]

But he knew that it was his responsibility to pass his values on to his six children. What he said to me was that no matter what you face, you must always be tough and confident, with no false pride, act self-assured, but not stubborn, and be tenacious, but also respectful. He also said that success is a mixture of authenticity, balance and courtesy.

[English]

Yesterday morning I had breakfast with the Carlsbad Springs Optimist Club which Mrs. Suzanne Langlois presides over. After the meeting these salt of the earth honest people recited the club's creed, which ends like this:

[Translation]

"I promise [...] to be too large for worry, too noble for anger, too strong for fear, and too happy to permit the presence of trouble."

[English]

This advice is something we should all heed.

Mr. Speaker, you have been invited by the hon. member for Joliette to censure me. This request is aimed at one of the most discreet members of this House, yet it is consistent with the barking invectives of his secessionist colleagues whose ideology is to dismember the territorial integrity of the best country in the world. Their view is that freedom of expression applies only to them, not to those who disagree with their misguided secessionist ideology.

The information that the hon. member would like to stifle is not privileged and it is readily available to the many visitors who are in the gallery at this very moment and to the few others who are watching on CPAC.

The hon. member may have wished to design a trap for me, but when doing so it is always wiser not to use the blueprints of a boomerang.

• (1550)

[Translation]

There is a fine line between humility and humiliation, but those who do not understand the meaning of humility quickly learn the meaning of humiliation.

[English]

Members of this House have an obligation to respect privileged information, but we should have no fewer rights than any other citizen in disseminating information that is not privileged. Our procedure and practice is clear on this matter. On page 614 of O'Brien-Bosc it clearly states that the Speaker has no authority to rule on statements made outside the House.

Mr. Speaker, if you do make a ruling in this instance, I respectfully urge you to resist the invitation to censure and to give more weight to freedom of expression for all.

[Translation]

The Speaker: I want to thank the hon. member for Ottawa—Orléans for his comments.

I will take them into account in making my decision on the point of order raised by the hon. member for Joliette.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

GENDER EQUITY IN INDIAN REGISTRATION ACT

The House resumed from March 26 consideration of the motion that Bill C-3, An Act to promote gender equity in Indian registration by responding to the Court of Appeal for British Columbia decision in *McIvor v. Canada* (Registrar of Indian and Northern Affairs), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-3, An Act to promote gender equity in Indian registration by responding to the Court of Appeal for British Columbia decision in *McIvor v. Canada* (Registrar of Indian and Northern Affairs). It is a long title for a short bill. New Democrats will be supporting this bill at second reading.

It is important not only for the women and their children in Nanaimo—Cowichan but for the women and their children in British Columbia and across this country.

This somewhat technical bill is the result of a long-standing court case that Sharon McIvor had in British Columbia.

I am going to quote from the legislative summary because it deals with some of the technical aspects. The British Columbia Court of Appeal ruling gave rise to Bill C-3. The summary states:

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The decision dealt with the case of Sharon McIvor, who had lost status when she married a non-First Nations man and had been reinstated in 1985 under paragraph 6(1)(c) of the post-Bill C-31 Indian Act. Her son, Jacob Grismer, having only one First Nations parent, acquired status under subsection 6(2) but was unable to transmit that status to his children owing to his own marriage to a non-First Nations woman. In contrast, persons in the male line affected by the 1951 double mother rule, which legislated loss of status at age 21, had been reinstated for life under paragraph 6(1)(c) and were thus able to transmit status to their children whether or not they married out. The Court found that this circumstance placed persons in Jacob Grismer's position at a disadvantage amounting to an unjustified section 15 Charter violation, and issued a suspended declaration of invalidity of paragraphs 6(1)(a) and (c) of the Act to allow Parliament to amend the Act before 6 April 2010.

When we talk about paragraph 6(1)(a) and 6(1)(c) and subsection 6(2), it gets very confusing and convoluted but it was an important ruling by the B.C. Supreme Court.

I want to put the whole discussion around citizenship and status in context and give the very big picture. I am going to start with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Article 8 of the UN declaration states:

1. Indigenous peoples and individuals have the right not to be subjected to forced assimilation or destruction of their culture.
2. States shall provide effective mechanisms for prevention of, and redress for:
 - (a) Any action which has the aim or effect of depriving them of their integrity as distinct peoples, or of their cultural values or ethnic identities;
 - (b) Any action which has the aim or effect of dispossessing them of their lands, territories or resources;
 - (c) Any form of forced population transfer which has the aim or effect of violating or undermining any of their rights;
 - (d) Any form of forced assimilation or integration;
 - (e) Any form of propaganda designed to promote or incite racial or ethnic discrimination directed against them.

Article 33 of the UN declaration states:

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to determine their own identity or membership in accordance with their customs and traditions. This does not impair the right of indigenous individuals to obtain citizenship of the States in which they live.
2. Indigenous peoples have the right to determine the structures and to select the membership of their institutions in accordance with their own procedures.

With respect to the UN declaration the Conservative government indicated in the throne speech that it would take the next steps. That is why it is important to read into the record some of the articles in the UN declaration because it sets the context for why discussions around citizenship and status are so important.

In terms of history, I am sure many Canadians are not aware that first nations from coast to coast to coast have a very long history of making their own citizenship and membership decisions.

In July 2008 the Assembly of First Nations and Indian and Northern Affairs joint technical working group outlined some history in a technical briefing paper. It indicated that early colonial powers relied upon first nations criteria to determine early colonial definitions of an Indian, including birth, marriage, adoption, residency, self-identification, kinship and community ties.

•(1555)

However, the consolidation of colonial legislation policy into the first Indian Act in 1876, which included legal definitions of the terms "Indian" and "statutory criteria" for who was and was not able to register as an Indian essentially laid the groundwork for the complete

segregation from those who remained Indian and assimilation through the loss of status and existing rights.

The article goes on to talk about various changes, but I want to talk about other ones. The Gradual Enfranchisement Act of 1869 was the first law denying Indian status to an Indian woman who married out and which prevented her children from acquiring status. This provision was carried forward into the first Indian Act in 1876. From 1869 on, federal Indian legislation included successive Indian acts and introduced and solidified gender-based criteria within the definition of an Indian and in the treatment of Indian men and women.

This included the central role of patrilineal descent requirements and gender-based discrimination in the treatment of Indian to non-Indian marriages whereby Indian women who married a non-Indian lost their status and their children were not entitled to be registered. In contrast, Indian men who married non-Indians retained their status and their non-Indian spouse and offspring were entitled to be registered as Indians.

The article talks about the definition in 1876 and states:

In addition, the Act and subsequent amendments also continued and furthered the policy of enfranchisement, which became compulsory in a number of circumstances. For example, enfranchisement was automatic if an Indian became a doctor, lawyer, Christian minister, or earned a university degree.

Not only did gender discrimination become an integral part of the Indian Act from 1869 until the present day, but there was an enfranchisement policy that if first nations decided to get an education, they lost their status.

The 1951 amendments to the Indian Act further entrenched gender-based criteria in the definition of an Indian and ineligibility for registration and some precedents set by earlier Indian acts continued to prevail.

For example, Indians were defined as male persons of Indian blood and their descendants and wives. A woman derived her status through her father and then through her husband. If she married a non-native, a Métis, or a non-status Indian, she lost her status. Since children derive their status through their fathers, her children and future generations would also be ineligible to register.

The child of an unmarried registered mother would have status unless it was demonstrated that the father of the child did not have status. People who received or whose ancestors received land or money scrip were not considered Indians and therefore not eligible to be registered.

There is a long, long history of many attempts to limit from the outside from what was a colonial government and then turned out to be a patriarchal government later on, who would be considered first nations, or in those days Indian, in this country. Today we are debating a piece of legislation that very narrowly addresses one aspect of that discriminatory practice that became inherent in the Indian Act.

I want to touch on a couple of other things in the history. In 1961, there was an amendment to end the compulsory enfranchisement of men or bands. The rules indicating that if they had an education they no longer could be enfranchised were removed in 1961. This is how long the fight for equality has been going on.

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In the early 1970s Jeannette Lavell and Yvonne Bédard challenged the discriminatory language of section 12(1)(b) of the Indian Act. Both women had lost their Indian status because they had married white men. The Supreme Court ruled that the Indian Act was not discriminatory as the women gained the legal rights of white women at the same time they lost their status as Indian women. In the 1970s the courts seemed to be saying that it is better to be a white woman than a first nations woman.

This continued to have devastating consequences for women. Indian women who would later marry a non-Indian would lose their status as would the children of their marriage. These disenfranchised women were prohibited from residing on reserve, inheriting family property, receiving treaty benefits, participating in band councils and other affairs of the Indian community, and being buried in cemeteries with their ancestors. Not only did they lose their status, but they also lost the right to be part of their cultural and linguistic community. Many of these women or their ancestors had been leaders in their communities.

● (1600)

This of course was in stark contrast to first nations men who could marry whomever they desired with impunity. In fact, a non-Indian woman who married an Indian man would gain Indian status. According to the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, approximately 4,605 Indian women lost their Indian status by marrying white men between the years of 1958 and 1968.

In 1981, Sandra Lovelace, a Maliseet woman from Tobique—Mactaquac, forced the issue by taking her case to the United Nations human rights committee, contending that she should not have to lose her own status by marriage. Of course, this subsequently led to what is now known as Bill C-31 from 1985. I am going to come back and touch on that in just a moment because, although we are discussing Bill C-3, there are some lessons to be learned from Bill C-31 from 1985.

In the current context, what we have is a very narrow attempt, based on the B.C. Supreme Court decision, to deal with some gender inequities in the Indian Act. I know a number of members in this House were present for the debate on the repeal of section 67 of the Human Rights Act that now allows first nations members to file human rights complaints on a variety of issues. At the time, witnesses came before the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development to say that what we are in effect doing is beginning to make changes to the Indian Act on a piecemeal basis, and what we can end up with is unintended consequences by not taking a step back and having a more holistic approach to the whole Indian Act.

When we start tinkering with one section, we often do not know what the impact will be further down the road, and I am going to come back to Bill C-31 in that context. However, regarding the current context and what this bill does not deal with, the band council of the Wabanaki Nation has provided a briefing document that talks about the fact that this piece of legislation does not deal with a couple of other problems.

It talks about the sibling rule, where at the time of birth, Indian registration rules did not allow for the registration of illegitimate daughters of an Indian father and a non-Indian mother. It goes on to

say that a brother would have the right to be registered at the time of his birth since the Indian registration rules did not allow for the registration of illegitimate daughters of an Indian father and a non-Indian mother, but they did allow for the registration of their illegitimate sons. That is still a case that is outstanding and it is just one example of some of the challenges in the status aspect of the Indian Act which is not dealt by Bill C-3.

Again, I have indicated that New Democrats are prepared to support the bill at second reading; however, I would urge the government to take a much broader look at the Indian Act and its potential impacts.

I want to talk a little about resources, and this is where I am going to talk about Bill C-31 a bit. The Six Nations of the Grand River have prepared a citizenship briefing note, and it raises the spectre around the fact that Indian and Northern Affairs is pursuing an amendment to the Indian Act to respond to the directions from the B.C. Court of Appeal, to be in place by April 6, 2010.

First nations have not been adequately consulted regarding amendments, nor provided clear information on the impact on their communities, and Six Nations is not alone in raising concerns around the impact on the communities.

Just touching briefly on the issue of consultation, the government acknowledges that in this particular case, it has not done consultation. What it has said in that context was that the time was limited, that there was a mandate from the B.C. Supreme Court that it had to move forward. There are some very grave concerns that all aspects of this bill and its potential impacts have not been adequately examined. In fact, the government itself has been unable to give any clear idea of the impacts on communities.

What it has said is that it has estimated that there will be upwards of 45,000 people who could be reinstated as a result of Bill C-3, and that is from Mr. Stewart Clatworthy's report, who is a demographer and has done some work regarding this issue.

● (1605)

There have been no announcements and no budget allocations to deal with the increased administrative duty that comes attached to this bill. Back when Bill C-31 passed in 1985, *The Globe and Mail* reported that the government officers on two shifts a day were adding more than 500 people per week to the country's official Indian population. The system became swamped with more than 38,000 applicants seeking status for more than 76,000 people. That was in 1985 with Bill C-31.

Of course, we know that Bill C-31 had some other impacts on communities. Bill C-31 created additional problems. There was increased financial pressure on first nations to provide services to newly enfranchised members, and this was housing, health services, education, all of the kinds of services that come along with status.

It created divisions in some communities and families with an impact on community cohesion and identity. Part of that challenge arose because there simply was not enough money to allow people to move back to their home communities.

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Just a reminder, some of these women who had married non-status men had been raised in their communities, had the cultural and the linguistic connections, and yet once they regained their status there simply was not enough housing to allow them to move home.

It did create divisions in some communities because of those very limited resources. It has led to a decline in status population and an increased restriction on the ability to transmit status to their children.

I want to turn on that point. There is something called the second generation cutoff in Bill C-31. And again, I would presume it was an unintended consequence because surely the government of the day would not have legislated assimilation, which is in fact what the second generation cutoff does in Bill C-31. The reason I am raising this in the context of Bill C-3 is again that unintended consequence.

In reassessing the population impacts of Bill C-31, Stewart Clatworthy prepared a report on February 26, 2001. Although it is a very lengthy report, I just want to quote from one part of it. Mr. Clatworthy assessed the continuation of the current rules of Bill C-31. He said that if Bill C-31 did not change, if it was the status quo, this is what we could anticipate as the impact of the second generation cutoff. He said:

The number of survivors and descendants who do not qualify for registration is expected to increase from the current level of about 21,700 to nearly 400,000 within two generations.

He was projecting a serious acceleration of the numbers of people who will lose status. He said:

After three generations (year 2074) individuals who are not entitled to registration are projected to form the majority of the population.

Many people have referred to this as legislated assimilation. I want to come back to what I started with when I indicated that prior to contact, and even in the early days of colonial rule, the colonial government of the day took first nations definitions of who was first nations from first nations.

In the context of Bill C-3, although I recognize that there was a court imposed deadline, it could have been an opportunity, once that court decision was issued, for the government to implement a full consultative process to look at all aspects of citizenship and membership.

This was an important opportunity to right some of the wrongs around the gender inequality but also to look at some of the unintended consequences of Bill C-31.

I look forward to having discussions in committee about the complex nature of status and citizenship. I am expecting that we will have some very excellent presentations before the committee that lay out some of the challenges.

●(1610)

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in order not to miss a single word of my colleague's speech, I listened very closely to both the original version and the translation. I thought it was important to understand exactly what my colleague was saying. Since I bump into her sometimes and we work together on the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, I want to thank her for the work she did on this and is still doing, because it is not finished.

If we go all the way and approve and pass this bill, whether with amendments or not, does she think there will still be discrimination between native men and women? If so, does she have a solution? How could we eliminate the discrimination that has existed since the passage of the Indian Act?

[English]

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, I know the member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue works tirelessly on the aboriginal affairs committee and is very knowledgeable about the serious issues facing aboriginal communities across this country.

I do not believe that Bill C-3 would deal with all of the gender inequalities that are inherent in the current Indian Act. I had indicated in my speech that there is still a problem with illegitimate daughters. Illegitimate daughters have a different status, whereas illegitimate sons maintain their status. That is just one example of some of the challenges still in place in the Indian Act.

We have known unequivocally since 1973 that there are serious problems with the status provisions in the Indian Act. Here we are in 2010 picking at one small aspect of it. We need a comprehensive approach to status of citizenship.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for what all members have come to expect from her, which is a thoughtful, comprehensive, and well thought out speech to the House, as well as one that is very fair.

It seems to me that Bill C-3 deals with a very critical and important issue not only to the first nations of this country but to many Canadians who want to have a just and progressive relationship develop between the first nations and all Canadians, and progress for all bands across this country.

It also seems to me that substance and process are both engaged by this bill. Process, in particular, that the bill raises is the importance of consultation with first nations, the involvement of first nations, and the right of first nations to help shape a proper response to the very critical issue about the definition of who does and does not obtain Indian status in this country.

I would like the member to comment, if she would, on the importance of process, as well as the substantive issues engaged by this bill.

●(1615)

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, the member for Vancouver Kingsway raises a very important issue.

As the member is well aware, there have been numerous Supreme Court decisions in Canada that talk about the duty to consult. There have been various efforts to define what that would look like, including an interim paper the government issued on consultation. However, even in the process of developing that interim consultation process, first nations have not been included adequately in it. What we have, again, is a process that is imposed somewhere else without adequate input from first nations.

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Some first nations have done a tremendous amount of work themselves regarding the definition of what a duty to consult would look like. Because this is not the only piece of legislation that is going to come before us, I suggest that we need to look at the Supreme Court decisions regarding duty to consult and at the very good work that first nations have done regarding duty to consult, and come up with a process so that we do not have to continuously raise this in the House.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I too would like to echo the comments by the member for Vancouver Kingsway that the member has presented a very well thought out presentation on Bill C-3.

It seems to me that Sharon McIvor has gone through a lot to bring things to where they are right now, when she should not have had to do any of it. These problems should have been rectified years ago. It was not until the Conservative government of John Diefenbaker that native people even had the right to vote in this country in the 1960s. Where have the governments been all these years?

The member certainly understands the issue better than almost anyone in the House. She has indicated that there is still going to be a problem with illegitimate daughters. The question I have for her is this. Does she feel that we are going to be able to deal with that issue of this particular bill at the committee stage?

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, at this stage we will certainly be looking at the outstanding issues, those raised by the New Democrats anyway, around gender inequality that currently exist in the legislation. The question becomes whether or not we could introduce an amendment that would be considered to be within the scope of the bill.

The hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona mentioned the fact that Sharon McIvor has been at this for 20 years. She and her family have been struggling with this very important issue for so long that it would seem that we need to move expeditiously to ensure Sharon and her family are no longer disenfranchised. Having said that, we need to look at all the other people who are impacted by the inequalities in the legislation.

It is incumbent upon us as members of the standing committee to make sure we do our due diligence when the bill comes before committee, so that we are looking at other aspects where people are being shut out. We need to look at the resource implications for bands. We also need to look at whether there would be unintended consequences, as there were in Bill C-31 in 1985. Are there going to be unintended consequences that would shut somebody else out, which we did not catch when we were considering the legislation?

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Chief Atleo of the Assembly of First Nations has highlighted the fact that the government has provided little information thus far to either this House or to first nations leaders. He is concerned about the possibility of a huge influx, perhaps tens of thousands, of people obtaining new status registrations. He has asked how the government could claim to be acting in the interests of first nations without allocating the resources that would obviously be needed to accompany a bill that may affect thousands of families and communities across this country.

I would be very interested in the member's comments about the resources she feels may or may not be necessary for first nations to deal with the issues raised by this bill.

• (1620)

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, the resource issue is extremely important. Not only does it impact on the ability of bands to deliver things like housing and other social services, but the people who regain status will be entitled to education and health benefits, even if they live off-reserve. To date the government has been absolutely silent on what kind of resources it will put toward members who regain status.

In addition, the government's own numbers are shaky. The government is estimating 45,000 up to 100,000. That will have a significant impact on any band council's resources. We already know bands are underfunded with a 2% funding cap, and if another level of people regaining status is added in, bands will simply not be able to deal with the influx.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to rise and speak to Bill C-3. It brings back memories. Already when you were the chair of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, we started discussing this bill or at least the imminent emergence of a bill to amend section 6 of the Indian Act, an act that is probably by far the most discriminatory legislation that Canada passed all last century.

I would like to acknowledge the outstanding job done on this bill by our researcher in the social affairs division, Ms. Hurley, who works for the Library of Parliament. She submitted a superb document, which we received today, on the history and the reasons why we are talking today about the McIvor decision of the British Columbia Court of Appeal and why we want to amend the Indian Act.

We started trying to deal with the Indians in 1850, of course in a Canadian way. There was the American way. Everyone remembers the American way and Wounded Knee, where virtually all the Sioux and several other aboriginal communities were exterminated. They were driven off their lands through war.

In Canada, we took a gentler approach, although it was just as assimilatory in intent as the American way, which was to exterminate. We decided on a somewhat gentler approach and all the ensuing governments to the present day should look themselves in the mirror and say they are responsible for the fact that we are today debating Bill C-3 to hopefully put an end—even if only partially—to unparalleled discrimination against women in Canada and against aboriginal women.

I have rarely seen a bill trying to end such discrimination in an existing piece of legislation. The act was called an Act for the gradual enfranchisement of Indians, the better management of Indian affairs, and to extend the provisions of the Act thirty-first Victoria, chapter forty-two. The bill was passed in 1869. Nothing could be more paternalistic than that.

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In 1850, the first statutory definition of “Sauvages” in Canada was brought in. I am going to offer a history lesson on assimilation, for those who are listening to us. A better job of causing a people to disappear could not be done than the job Canada did with the Indians, with the first peoples. That much is clear. The reason some of them survive today is certainly not down to the governments that came one after another; it is because the aboriginal people had great resilience.

In 1850, the first statutory definition of “Sauvages” was inclusive, that is not me saying it, we have to go back to the Act for the Better Protection of the Lands and Property of Indians in Lower Canada, Statutes of Canada 1850, chapter 42. The Indians’ land was taken, and it was the federal government that flatly declared itself the trustee. But there were quite a lot of Indians. A way had to be found for there to be fewer of them.

● (1625)

A law passed in 1869 brought in the first provision under which the marriage of an Indian woman to a non-Indian resulted in the woman and her children losing status. A man retained all his rights and powers, while a woman who married a white man lost all her rights. And that has been the case since 1850.

The Bloc wants to speak out against that situation in the House. Over the next few months, we will try to find solutions. They will not be easy solutions, because the aboriginal peoples of Canada have been the victims of discrimination and assimilation in recent years.

It was in 1951 that an attempt was finally made to incorporate the double mother rule, under which a person who was registered at birth lost their status and their band membership at the age of 21 if their parents had married after the Indian Act came into force, in September 1951, and if their mother and father’s mother had gained status solely by marriage.

In other words, there was no problem if a man married a white woman, if an Indian man married an Indian woman and if an Indian man married a white woman. But if an Indian woman married a white man, she lost all her rights. That is what happened.

As far as I know, it is still women who bear children. Unless and until that changes, very clearly it is women who will be victims of discrimination under the Indian Act. That is still the case today and it will still be the case in the future, even if Bill C-3 is passed.

We are going to solve the problem in committee. We agree that the bill should be studied in committee.

Sometime last year, the House passed Bill C-21 to repeal section 67 of the Indian Act, which states that the Canadian Human Rights Act does not apply on reserve. That was impressive. Under Bill C-21, as of June 2011, the Canadian Human Rights Act will apply to aboriginal communities. Bill C-3 will add to the rights of women in these communities.

I hope that the government will see the light and adopt the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. I hope this will happen in my lifetime and during Mr. Speaker’s tenure. Sadly, for the time being, we are nowhere near seeing this happen.

● (1630)

What is the McIvor decision? It is not very complicated. I have mentioned the milestones of the Indian Act. There was 1869, and then 1951. Another very important date after 1951 was 1985. That year, the Liberals, who thought they were so clever, introduced Bill C-31. The government at the time had a strong majority, and thus it was able to pass this legislation, which took effect in 1985. The problem is that Bill C-31, as it was passed, did not solve the problems.

Bill C-31 was supposed to remove discrimination, restore Indian status and ties to the band, that is membership rights, and enable bands to take charge of the status of their members on their own. Then the dispute started because, as they say, “The devil is in the details”, “Le diable est dans les détails” or, as you might sometimes hear in Quebec, “Le yâble est dans les détails”. I cannot wait to hear what the translators will do with that. So the “yâble” is in the details.

An hon. member: Le diable!

M. Marc Lemay: I said “le yâble” not “le diable”. That would be too easy to translate. So this was a very exceptional situation and the problem was still not fixed. Not only was the problem not fixed, but others were created. Basically, bands were given control over the status of their members. Bill C-31 gave bands some powers, but you had to belong to one.

So why would you want to register as an Indian? This is an extremely important concept. Indian registration is indeed the first step in gaining not only Indian status, but also peer recognition in the community. Membership is a very important concept, as it entitles individuals to live on reserve, participate in political processes such as the election of band chiefs, own property on reserve and share band resources. It permits recognition of one’s origins and the practice of one’s culture. And that is the problem.

Bill C-31 was passed in 1985 and that is when the problems began. Ms. McIvor is one of its victims. It is the reason we are discussing this in Parliament. She went to the courts. She found, she still finds and I hope that she will always find the double standard to be discriminatory. I do not want to go into technical details, but the double standard is found in subsections 6(1), 6(2) and 6(3) of the Indian Act. To sum up, nothing changed. If an Indian woman marries a white, she loses all her rights. Bill C-31 did not fix this problem. It upheld it. However, a limit was set. If the woman was born before 1951, she had the right to Indian status. If she was born after 1951, she did not have that right.

So what happened? Ms. McIvor took it to the British Columbia Court of Appeal. As we speak, a dozen or so of these complaints are before the courts in various jurisdictions across Canada, including one or two similar cases currently before Quebec courts. The fundamental argument is that we must put an end to the discrimination that exists when an Indian woman marries a non-Indian man. The operative word is “marriage”. Indeed, in the Indian Act, there is no mention of couples. So under that piece of legislation, if a couple lives together without being married, any children born to the couple are illegitimate. Bill C-3, which we are debating here today, does not address that issue. It always talks about marriage.

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•(1635)

As soon as an Indian woman marries a non-Indian man, she loses all her rights. She will not get them back under Bill C-3.

So Ms. McIvor took her case to the British Columbia Supreme Court, which ruled in her favour. The federal government appealed the decision before the Federal Court, and the case was then heard by the Federal Court of Appeal.

On April 6, 2009, the Federal Court of Appeal ruled that section 6 of the Indian Act is discriminatory and that the government had to take steps to correct the situation. That is why we are currently examining the Sharon McIvor bill, that is, Bill C-3, to amend the Indian Act.

The problem is that it does not correct the situation. In 1985, regarding the changes proposed by Bill C-31, the government was asked how many new aboriginal people would be registered. It estimated that approximately 56,800 people would become new members of aboriginal communities.

Unfortunately for the government, on December 31, 2000, 114,000 people obtained Indian status, which helped stop assimilation. In the event this bill is passed, how many new aboriginal people will be registered? The government is unable to answer that question.

The worst answer came from departmental officials. For now, INAC estimates there will be roughly 40,000 or 45,000 new people, but the majority probably live off reserve. It is the “but” that is important here. Even if Indian status is given to new people who live off reserve, they will probably be assimilated, like many aboriginals living off reserve and in big cities.

Today, the question is whether there is enough money to include these new people. We do not know and that is worrisome. The federal government has frozen the annual budget increase for aboriginal people at 2%. There will be a serious problem when Bill C-3 comes into force.

We will see the reaction of aboriginals appearing before committee. The Bloc Québécois will ask that it be mostly women because they are the ones being discriminated against. With all due respect, the men have not lost anything. Initially, large band councils were headed by women. The Indian Act put an end to the passing on of tradition by women.

I will stop here, but if the House gave me permission to continue for another 10 minutes, I would be very happy.

•(1640)

[English]

Mr. John Duncan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will ask the member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue a question that will give him an opportunity to speak some more, because I know he has not had a full opportunity.

I will mention a couple of things and ask a question.

First, there was not a lot talked about in either of the previous two speeches by the members for Nanaimo—Cowichan and Abitibi—

Témiscamingue, but there is an exploratory process that goes beyond this legislation that has been announced. That has sent the right message on the other issues that keep creeping in, which is registration, membership and citizenship issues, a broad range of issues that the bill brings to the floor.

I would also like to make a comment. The member for Nanaimo—Cowichan talked about how we were dealing piecemeal with the Indian Act. In full recognition of that, the legislation is addressing a narrow court decision, but what we have also discovered is that one size does not fit all.

Finally, the member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue made reference to Mary Hurley, our committee researcher. I would like to think the other members of the committee would join with us in congratulating her on her work. She is in her last week. I understand she is retiring this week, so special significance and special recognition to her. We wish her a long, prosperous and healthy retirement.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I would join the member in those sentiments.

The hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Mr. Speaker, am I to understand that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development agrees with my colleagues that I should keep talking for 10 more minutes? No? Oh well, it was worth a try.

I agree with my colleague. There have been pseudo-consultations. With respect, I would add that I am not sure that the Supreme Court Act required the government to hold broad consultations. Nevertheless, I hope that the government is not expecting this bill to pass quickly, certainly not before Easter. That will not happen. It may pass before Easter 2011, but certainly not before Easter 2010. We want to hear from women. I hope that many women's groups are listening today. I would invite aboriginal women who have been negatively affected by this unfair, arbitrary and discriminatory law to talk to committee members about what they would like to see happen.

[English]

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue gave a very thorough speech. It is no surprise that I have a couple of questions for him in reference to the process that has been set out for some sort of consultation. As always, the devil is in the details.

At this point, it is whether it will be the kind of process that was done with matrimonial real property. A report tabled by Wendy Grant-John outlined some processes around consultation and they were promptly disregarded.

There are a couple of other thorny parts around what is being disregarded. Clatworthy, back in 2001, identified the fact that the contribution of unstated paternity was a factor in determining membership. The presumption is if the woman does not identify who the father is, that he is non-status, that has accelerated the non-status position. That problem is not dealt with in this legislation.

Government Orders

The second one is around resources. We know the resourcing issue is critical to allow bands to deal with people who could potential regain status. Could the member elaborate on the issues around resources.

• (1645)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague.

Quite humbly, I must say that I do not know who would be entitled. That will be a priority issue when the committee begins its study of Bill C-3 and its application.

Women's rights were compromised by Bill C-31 in 1986 and especially by the 1951 Indian Act. We must not let that happen again. The problem started in 1951. I know, that is an important year—it is the year I was born—but that year some problems made their way into the Indian Act, and governments have been trying to fix those problems ever since. I hope that this government will find the resources and give aboriginal peoples a chance to make progress. Many aboriginal people will go back to the reserves. These are people who have always wanted to go back but cannot because the reserves do not have adequate funding to accept them. Let us hope that Bill C-3 will make it possible for people to go back to the reserves.

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague for making us aware of this issue. When I was the critic of the status of women in 2004-05, I was truly struck by the plight of aboriginal women. These women truly experienced extreme violence. It is disturbing that a bill such as this heaps more discrimination on them. We wonder how they will find a way to turn things around.

This is the first I have heard about the bill. My colleague spoke of the loss of privileges when an aboriginal woman marries a white man. Can he give concrete examples? What are these privileges?

Mr. Marc Lemay: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Trois-Rivières. An Indian woman who marries a white man loses all her rights. This means that she is no longer a band member and she is thrown out of the band. She has to leave the area and generally, she and her children are literally—and I do mean literally—removed forcibly from the reserve. That has happened. Therefore, she is no longer an Indian within the meaning of the *Indian Act*. She cannot own property on the reserve. She and her husband cannot own a house. They are expelled from the reserve.

That has happened in Quebec. It has actually started happening again with the Mohawks. It has happened in a number of other communities. There is a shortage of land. If a woman is not an Indian under the law, she is turned out. She loses her rights, her children lose all their rights under the Indian Act, that is, the right to be recognized. What is worse, they lose their culture. When you are expelled you have no rights. You are on the outside.

You would not believe that this could happen in Canada. However, that is exactly what has happened to aboriginal women over the past century and it is unacceptable. Women had power because tradition was passed on by women, by mothers. Overnight, they had their rights trampled on. This was confirmed in 1951 and in

1985. Let us hope that this is not the case when we have finished studying Bill C-3.

• (1650)

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

Some hon. members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The motion is carried. Accordingly the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

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

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): 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 Edmonton—Strathcona, the Environment; the hon. member for Don Valley West, Airline Security; the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst, Justice.

* * *

CANADA-JORDAN FREE TRADE ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-8, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the Agreement on the Environment between Canada and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the Agreement on Labour Cooperation between Canada and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to address Bill C-8, which is the exact replica of Bill C-57, that was introduced before the prorogation imposed by the Conservative government.

This bill includes the act to implement the free trade agreement between Canada and Jordan, the agreement on the environment and the agreement on labour cooperation. These are three very important elements. Generally speaking, agreements on the environment and on labour laws are side agreements. As is implied by the term, side documents are separate agreements. So, there is not a lot of interface between the free trade agreement and the agreements on the environment and on labour.

Jordan is a small country landlocked in the Middle East. It is surrounded by Syria to the north, by Iraq to the northeast, by Saudi Arabia to the east and south, and by Israel and the West Bank to the west. It covers an area slightly larger than that of New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island together, and it has a population of about 5.1 million people.

Jordan has one of the smallest economies in the Middle East. In terms of purchasing power parity, Jordan's gross domestic product in 2008 was \$31.7 billion in U.S. dollars, which compares to that of the Honduras, Nepal and Turkmenistan. One wonders why Canada is committed to negotiating free trade agreements with such small countries.

Government Orders

Jordan ranks 14th among Canada's top trading partners in the Middle East, with a share of 0.7% of the regional trade. We do business with Jordan to the tune of about \$9.2 million. Canadian exports to Jordan total \$76.8 million, while imports from that country amount to \$15.4 million. If we use this 0.7% in relation to Canada's GDP, we get the figure of 0.00575%, which is very small.

Canada's main exports to Jordan are paper and paper products, which total \$17.5 million and represent 22.8% of all exports. Exports of copper and copper products and root vegetables and tubers total \$8.3 million and account for 10.8% of exports.

Exports have risen slightly since 2003. Canadian products represent 76.8% of exports to Jordan, and 61.5% of those products are easily identifiable. I am sorry, but I do not have any information about the remaining exports.

Canadian imports from Jordan include clothing. Clothing imports total \$6.9 million and account for 45.1% of all imports from Jordan.

• (1655)

This shows very clearly the importance of the Jordanian market to Canada. We can easily see that this is not really a free trade agreement focused on trade or business; it is mainly a political agreement. The Bush administration signed an agreement with Jordan, so naturally the Conservatives want to follow suit and sign a free trade agreement with Jordan.

The Bloc Québécois has been saying for a long time that bilateral agreements are not necessarily the best way of doing business with other countries. Basically, every country's goal is to sign agreements with other countries. If we trade with 200 other countries, then eventually we will end up with 200 different agreements that will be better for some countries than others, depending on what one country is hoping to gain from another. This creates inequalities and often, unfortunately, causes a downward spiral when it comes to things like social conditions, labour conditions—including wages—and the environment, all of which the Bloc Québécois considers extremely important. These are all factors that make people willing to commit to a job in order to earn an honest living, which they do not do everywhere, because trade liberalization is important. People need other countries to supply them with the resources they do not have at home, but there are ways of going about getting those resources. We should not be trying to sign free trade agreements just for the sake of signing them, even if they are not very significant.

Jordan essentially represents a very small market and a very low export volume.

We get the impression that the main purpose of concluding this agreement is to send a message to other Middle Eastern countries wanting to develop better economic relations with the West. Jordan is in the process of modernizing its government and its economy, and is relying heavily on international trade to support its economic growth, since it has few natural resources. Promoting trade with this country could therefore send a very clear message to other countries.

From a commercial point of view, Jordan's agricultural sector is poorly developed and does not present a threat to Quebec farmers. On the contrary, given its limited forest resources, it represents a new opportunity for the Quebec pulp and paper industry, which is already Quebec's number one export industry to Jordan. However, although

the Bloc Québécois supports Bill C-8, we have a problem with the Conservative government's strategy of focusing on bilateral agreements instead of taking a multilateral approach, as advocated by the Bloc Québécois. The Bloc Québécois believes that a multilateral approach is more effective for the development of more equitable trade that protects the interests of all nations.

I am also quite concerned about one other aspect. Despite the fact that natural ground and surface waters, in their liquid, gas or solid form, are excluded from the agreement by the enabling statute, the Bloc Québécois noted that this exclusion is not written into the text of the agreement itself. That is why we would like to ensure that Quebec's major water resources are clearly excluded from the agreement, so that control over their development remains in the hands of Quebecers.

As the House will recall, a few years ago I moved a motion in the House specifically to ensure that NAFTA include an exemption that would ban the bulk export of water from Canada and Quebec to other countries, and that we not be forced into such exports.

• (1700)

Often in free trade agreements, when goods become an object of trade, the countries we deal with can force us to export goods that we would prefer to exclude from such agreements.

As I said earlier, Jordan increasingly wants to modernize. It changed direction when Abdallah II acceded to the throne in 1999. Under his reign, Jordan implemented economic policies that were responsible for a major increase in economic growth over the ensuing decade, which has continued since 2009. Jordan now has one of the freest, most competitive economies in the Middle East, surpassing the United Arab Emirates and Lebanon.

I would like to provide a few economic statistics. In 2008, Jordan's GDP was \$31.01 billion. Per capita GDP was about \$5,000. In 2008, the growth rate was 8.31%, the inflation rate 15.5%, and the unemployment rate 13.5%.

As I mentioned earlier, Jordan is relatively poor in natural resources, with the exception of potassium and phosphate. On the other hand, its population is young and very well educated. Jordan is counting heavily on international trade to ensure its development. Of all the Arab countries, it has signed the most free trade agreements. Among the co-signatories to these agreements are the United States, the European Union, Singapore, Tunisia, Algeria, Malaysia, Libya and Syria. Further agreements with Iraq, the Palestinian Authority, Lebanon and Pakistan are in the works. Jordan has therefore been pretty active when it comes to signing free trade agreements. Its economy is very dependent on several kinds of imports and, even though it has limited resources, it can export a number of products.

Government Orders

Jordan has special economic zones that attract foreign investment. These zones generally involve lower taxes and tariffs than in the rest of the country in order to encourage exports. One of these special zones, Aqaba or Akaba, opened in 2001 and offers a flat 5% tax rate on most business activities as well as no tariffs on imported goods and no property taxes for companies. Despite the high unemployment rate in Jordan, companies located in this zone can hire foreigners for up to 70% of their workforces. Finally, foreign companies can repatriate 100% of their profits.

The main impediments in the Jordanian economy are the weak water delivery systems and dependence on foreign markets for energy and oil. Total trade in goods between Canada and Jordan is about \$92 million.

The Bloc's position is well known. When we study a bill, we always study it from the standpoint of Quebec. We represent Quebec and its interests. The agreement is aimed primarily at Canadian exports of agricultural products to Jordan. This was mentioned at the press conference held on November 17 by the agriculture minister at the time.

• (1705)

Limited water reserves and an arid climate prevent Jordan from developing significant agriculture. The agricultural sector there has been in decline for a number of years and represented just 2.4% of the GDP in 2004. Although Jordan represents a small market globally, a significant portion of total Canadian exports to Jordan comes from Quebec.

According to the Institut de la statistique du Québec, 44.8% of total Canadian exports to Jordan came from Quebec in 2008. This proportion was 33.8% in 2007. The volume of this trade is nonetheless very small, considering that the total value of Quebec's exports to Jordan was a mere \$35 million in 2008, despite significant growth that began in 2007, going from approximately \$18 million to just under \$35 million in 2006 and 2008.

Quebec's exports are predominantly copper products, followed very closely by pulp and paper. These two sectors represent roughly \$25 million of the \$35 million in total exports from Quebec to Jordan.

Jordanian imports to Quebec have been quite modest, representing less than \$3 million a year, before seeing growth starting in 2005 and peaking in 2007, with a total of just under \$8 million. They have been in decline since then, falling back below \$6 million in 2008. Quebec's trade balance is therefore positive, with exports of roughly \$35 million in 2008 versus exports of \$6 million. These imports are predominantly textiles and clothing, for a value of a little over \$4 million, followed by exotic fruit and nut imports to a much lesser degree.

Under these conditions, we might ask, given the relative importance of Canada compared to Quebec, why a free trade agreement should be concluded with Jordan. Even though we prefer a multilateral approach, the fact remains that Quebec nonetheless has a positive trade balance with Jordan. However, I repeat and I will continue repeating: we want Canada to adopt a multilateral approach.

Given the relative importance of a free trade agreement with Jordan, this agreement is even more proof that Canada has abandoned the multilateral approach.

Overall, the multilateral system has been extremely effective in dealing with the problems countries may face in their relations and negotiations regarding labour, the exploitation of workers or the environment.

The agreement we are looking at now does not include an investment agreement, but we know that Canada signed a foreign investment protection agreement separate from the free trade agreement. Such situations are rare.

• (1710)

We would like the government to keep making improvements to its bilateral agreements. But most of all, we would like the government to return to a multilateral approach as quickly as possible, to prevent all kinds of injustices, inequities and inequalities from creeping into bilateral agreements.

[English]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the hon. member that multilateral agreements would be a much better approach. He indicated there was \$92 million in trade in 2008, I believe. This morning one of the government speakers indicated that trade had dropped off substantially last year and we are not sure why that is, whether it is just the economy, but it dropped from \$92 million down to around \$80 million. I wonder whether the member has any ideas as to why that would have happened.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cardin: Mr. Speaker, I assume that the figures the member just gave me are the 2009 and 2008 figures. I remind the NDP member that he should always double-check figures that come from the government. I have here two different reports from 2008, which I got from a government website, and which do not have the same figures. The figures may not be correct, but it seems clear that the economic uncertainty in 2009 could have led to a decrease in trade between Canada and Jordan, in one way or another.

• (1715)

[English]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today to speak to the bill and follow the hon. member from the Bloc.

As the members know, the bill was introduced last year as Bill C-57, but after Parliament prorogued it was reintroduced on March 24 as Bill C-8.

Government Orders

For people who are watching today, I will give a little information about the bill. This is an act to implement the free trade agreement between Canada and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the agreement on the environment between Canada and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the agreement on labour cooperation between Canada and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

The volume of the speeches in terms of intensity has dropped a lot compared to the speeches a few days ago on Bill C-2, the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement.

Clearly from our perspective in the NDP caucus, we certainly do not see the situation in Jordan being anywhere near as dire and bad as what we see with regard to the situation in Colombia.

Having said that, we see some concerns we can address as far as Jordan is concerned. We have reports from the U.S. Department of State dealing with the 2009 reports on human rights practices, which I will get into during my speech, and also a report by a lawyer from Jordan indicating problems with honour killings in Jordan and what is going on there to stop that from happening in Jordan.

Certainly there is room for improvement, once again, but it is not as dire a situation as we are dealing with in Colombia.

The critic for the NDP, the member for Burnaby—New Westminster, indicated this morning that we will be looking at this and are prepared to have the bill move to committee and deal with these issues at committee, because that is obviously where we are going to have to resolve some of these issues as to what the true situation is in Jordan as far as human rights are concerned and how we might better be able to amend or reconstruct the bill to deal with the situation in Jordan as we find it now.

I note that the volume of trade with Jordan is not large. In fact it dropped in 2009 from what it was in 2008. To get a flavour for what type of trade we are dealing with, I simply consulted the speech by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade in which he indicated that many Canadian companies have a solid presence in the Jordanian market. Interestingly enough, a company that I have been familiar with for many years, the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan, for instance is one of Jordan's top foreign investors. I did not know that.

It is joined by companies like RIM, Research In Motion, the manufacturer of the BlackBerry that we are all tied to; Bombardier; SNC-Lavalin; Four Seasons Hotel; and Second Cup coffee shops. Many others are active in Jordan.

The member who spoke before me dealt with the components of the trade between the countries. They are diverse. It is everything from forestry to agriculture, from food to machinery, as well as communications technologies and apparel.

• (1720)

Canada's expertise in nuclear power is another sector of interest to the Jordanians, especially as they are embarking on a nuclear energy program for their country. The member did talk about over \$90 million in trade between the two countries, although as a matter of fact I believe it was \$92 million. Once again, that dropped substantially last year.

Canada is a supplier to Jordan of a range of goods, including paper, copper, vegetables, machinery and wood. In addition, Canadian and Jordanian exporters have access to respective markets eliminating tariffs on a number of key products, and world-leading Canadian sectors, such as forestry and manufacturing, agriculture and agri-food will benefit as well as pulp and paper.

We get an idea, looking at his presentation, as to what sorts of products we are talking about here that are trading between these countries.

As I indicated, we are talking about a fairly small amount of trade. Jordan is a country of 5.1 million versus Colombia, which I believe is in the 40 million range, and has the smallest GDP among middle-eastern states. The economy remains dependent on foreign aid. Interestingly enough, Canada contributed about \$7.9 million in foreign aid in 2006-07.

The fact of the matter is that, on practically every debate about free trade agreements in this House, we have had the Conservative speakers question the NDP about why we do not like the agreement or what kind of agreement they have to come up with that would make us happy. Of course we respond to them that we are not in favour of their free trade approach nor have we ever been. We are in favour of a fair trade approach.

I would think that over time, whether it is with the government or a future government, we are going to see agreements renegotiated over time, in keeping with what the Bloc members have mentioned in their speeches. We are going to be looking at more multilateral approaches to fair trade, and we are going to be taking into account some of the elements that we in the NDP have been suggesting should be in fair trade agreements. For example, we have been suggesting new rules in agreements that promote sustainable practices and domestic job creation. We never seem to consider domestic job creation when we are negotiating these agreements.

When we are doing bilateral agreements, there is usually an imbalance of power in the arrangement. Our negotiators are trying to negotiate exactly what is best for us, not necessarily what is best for the local economy of the people we are negotiating with.

In addition to sustainable practices, we should be looking at domestic job creation and healthy working conditions, and while allowing us to manage the supply of goods, we should promote democratic rights and maintain democratic sovereignty at home.

The question is how we can promote fair trade and, as I indicated, new trade agreements that encourage improvement in social, environmental and labour conditions, rather than just minimizing the damage of unrestricted trade.

The federal and provincial procurement policies, which stimulate Canadian industries by allowing governments to favour suppliers here at home, supply management boards and single desk marketers, like the Canadian Wheat Board, headquartered in Winnipeg, can help replace imports with domestic products and materials.

Government Orders

The way the multilateral trade agreements have developed over the years is that we have potentially a flooding of a local market, as we have with the free trade agreements with Mexico and Colombia. For example, with tomatoes to Mexico and foods to Colombia, it basically put farmers, who have been self-sufficient for many years, out of business.

● (1725)

We destroy a solid farming community in a place like Colombia and we flood the market with cheap produce, which makes our farmers happy in the short run but at the end of the day we are not looking at the overall effect and the long-term damage to the local people. What we should be looking is developing agriculture on a local basis. We should be efficient and grow as much of our own products as possible. Obviously, we need to export some of our products and some products just do not grow in certain places. I mentioned the other day about importing bananas into Canada because we do not grow them here. We can export products that people do not have in other areas.

However, wherever possible, if a country can produce a product locally then we should be encouraging that in our practises and in our trade agreements.

Local community and individual initiatives to buy fair trade imports and locally produced goods are really important. As I indicated before, companies like Starbucks, which I am becoming increasingly familiar with almost on a daily basis, do tell people that they buy their coffees on a fair trade basis. People, especially young people, are more than willing to pay a fair price for coffee or whatever product they are selling, if they can be assured that the people at the other end are getting a fair wage and a fair return for the product.

People like to feel good about themselves. They like to know that if they buy an article of clothing, shoes, sweaters or whatever that it was not manufactured under sweat shop conditions. They like the idea of helping to bring up our economy and the economy of the producing country.

However, the bilateral agreements that we have seen so far are essentially extensions of the Ronald Reagan mantra and ideology of a race to the bottom, that we drive markets down and prices down to the lowest common denominator and we think that will be the ultimate in efficiency and that we will have a healthy economy because of it.

What has been the effect? The whole American mid-west is suffering greatly because jobs are being exported. We are exporting not only plants and the jobs that go with them out of Canada and the United States but we are exporting entire industries that were the backbone of our economy, our country and this continent for a number of years. There might be some short-term benefits but in the long run it is not better for the country as a whole.

The bottom line is that we need to become self-sufficient not only for ourselves but also for the people we are trading with.

We in the NDP feel fair trade policies are important. Even some members of the Conservative Party caucus feel that protecting the environment is the way to go by the use of domestically and locally produced goods. If a product is produced locally rather than sending

it thousands of miles across the continent, there will be less freight costs, fuel costs and less carbon will be produced. Promoting environmentally conscious methods for producers is something that benefits all of us and it is something that we should be working toward.

● (1730)

The free trade policies that we have adopted, that we have fostered over the last 10, 20 years as a government, have basically resulted in increased pollution to the environment and a bigger concentration of multinationals.

The environmental side agreement of NAFTA, for example, has proven to be largely unenforceable, particularly when compared with protections for industries and investors.

A system of fair trade can encourage the growth of Canadian jobs, both in terms of quality and quantity. Fair competition rules and tougher labour standards will put Canadian industries on a level playing field with our trading partners and slow the international race for the bottom that has resulted and the loss of Canadian manufacturing jobs. I dealt with that issue before about this kind of neo-conservative, and I guess liberal, ideology of racing to the bottom thinking that somehow that will solve the economy's problems.

Free trade rules, on the other hand, have hurt Canadian job quality. Since 1989, most Canadian families have seen a decline in real incomes. I know the member for Burnaby—New Westminster has spoken at length about that point many times, not only here in the House but at other speaking engagements he has had across the country.

Fair trade can also protect labour rights by fostering the growth of worker co-operatives and labour unions. Like the environmental side accord, we have a co-op in Winnipeg that anyone can join. Every year I get a cheque for \$800 or \$1,000 on gasoline purchases and the price of the gas is the same at all of the gas stations. It is the same price for the product and yet the co-operative sends rebates to the consumers of the product.

For example, NAFTA's labour agreements have gone mainly unenforced, getting industries that are willing to violate workers' rights giving incentives to relocate Canadian jobs. Fair trade policies that favour co-ops, unions and equitable pricing will protect workers in the developing world who might otherwise be exploited and would take away reasons for Canadian producers to export jobs.

Fair trade rules will also protect society and human rights around the globe. That was a very large concern in our debate just last week with regard to the Canada-Colombia free trade deal.

In the few minutes I have left I want to deal very quickly with the whole issue of the 2008 human rights report on Jordan produced by the U.S. Department of State. We say right at the outset that Jordan is not Colombia. Jordan does not have as many obvious human rights abuses as Colombia but there is potential for concern.

Government Orders

In addition to that report, we have a report prepared by an attorney, Ms. Nimry from Jordan, who explains in detail the whole issue of honour killings. The committee needs to look into that issue and find out why we are looking at an average of 25 honour killings a year in Jordan. We recognize that the Jordanian government is taking steps to deal with the issue but it is still happening. In some areas of Jordan, a woman's life is at risk if she talks to a man who is not a relative or if she refuses to marry someone who is chosen by the family or if she marries someone with whom her family does not approve or if she marries a man from a different religion.

I could go on with excerpts from this particular report. It is very interesting reading and it is something that we need to look at.

● (1735)

The Liberals, once again, might want to go holus-bolus and marry up with the Conservatives to try to run this through as quickly as possible to meet their free trade agenda but we in the NDP have no intention of letting things go that quickly. We want to ensure this bill goes to committee and is properly dealt with there.

Hon. Jim Abbott (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great intent to the NDP speaker and I have finally concluded that the NDP sees the glass as half empty whereas most Canadians see it as being half full.

Canadians have the capacity to be competitive in so many ways, as we have shown repeatedly. Whether it is in sports, industry or society, we can compete. We are the best in the world in so many different areas and yet as I listened to the member and the other NDP member who I made a comment about, I kept hearing that the glass was half empty and that we are somehow deficient. I just do not understand that.

Just by way of observation, I would note, however, that the coalition is alive and well. I see that the leader of the NDP's thoughts about corporate tax reductions have rubbed off on the Liberal leader. It is nice to see that the coalition lives. I am very pleased about that.

Mr. Jim Maloway: Mr. Speaker, those are comments from a member who is retiring from the House but who has been here some time. He was here last week when it was amply demonstrated who was in bed with who in the House on the Colombia free trade deal. It is only alive today because the Liberal critic, according to *The Globe and Mail*, managed to wine and dine the minister in Colombia and get an amendment, which he then took to the government and basically saved its bacon on this issue only two weeks ago. This bad free trade agreement with Colombia has been brought back to life by the Liberal Party.

What coalition is he talking about? The coalition is between him and the Liberals, which is where it has always been. Those two parties get into bed together historically over and over again.

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the NDP is actually correct. There is a coalition, a coalition to do what is good for the country, which is to create jobs, move our products and sell our goods and services.

However, there was one coalition he forgot to mention and that was the coalition where the NDP betrayed all of Canada after the 2005 budget which would have provided money for infrastructure,

urban transit, seniors, housing and the environment. That coalition brought us a \$56 billion deficit.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona on comments related to Bill C-8.

Mr. Jim Maloway: Mr. Speaker, the fact is that there is a coalition between the Liberal Party and the government. We just went through a budget exercise where the Liberals said that they would vote against the government's budget and then they voted for and against it at the same time. They left enough members out so the government would not fall.

When people are confused about where the Liberal Party stands on different issues, it should come as no surprise because even the Liberals do not know where they stand from one day to the next on issues.

As far as the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement is concerned, it is only alive because the Liberal critic managed to go to Colombia and negotiate an amendment and then presented it to the government. There is a coalition between the Liberals and the Conservatives on this issue.

● (1740)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Before we resume with questions, I remind all members that we are discussing Bill C-8, which is the Canada-Jordan trade agreement.

The hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I do have a question on Bill C-8.

The member for Elmwood—Transcona talked about fair trade. Many our ridings are suffering from things like the softwood lumber issue. In my riding of Nanaimo—Cowichan jobs have been shipped south as raw logs are shipped south because we simply do not do enough to protect our local jobs.

In particular, my question is on the environment side of the agreement. I know the member touched upon it briefly, but my understanding of the agreement is there are some problems because the environment agreement is essentially toothless.

It says that both countries would be required not to weaken their environmental regulations in order to attract investment. Both countries would be required to enforce their existing environmental regulations. To this end, mechanisms will be established to ensure environmental impact assessments occur for proposed projects. It goes on to talk about the fact that interested parties could request the government to investigate alleged violations.

Could the member comment more fully on what he would like to see in a fair trade agreement that would truly look at the environmental impact?

Mr. Jim Maloway: Mr. Speaker, the fact is environmental issues always seem to take a second seat to economic development and economic initiatives in our country and seemingly every other country.

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At the end of the day, we have to recognize that the days of companies simply polluting their backyards, then declaring bankruptcy or moving on and giving the taxpayers the bill are hopefully coming to an end. When we quantify the cost of cleanup of all environmental costs, we have not made any money in the whole exercise.

Our critic has indicated that this is not Canada-Colombia. Jordan is a different situation and it is not as bad as Colombia. We want to see this bill move to committee and we want to look at those very issues the member has pointed out, the whole area of environmental issues and also the whole issue of the honour killings in Jordan and other types of human rights and abuses that are detailed in the human rights report put out by the United States Department of State.

The government likes to follow the Americans, so I would think it would pay some attention to the United States Department of State when it comes up with human rights assessments of various countries. We should be looking at this in great detail when we get this into committee, and that should happen fairly soon.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when we talk about trade policy, the members opposite like to raise the word competitive. I think Canadians want to see competitiveness as part of our policy, but there is another word that starts with “c”, which is conscientious. I think Canadians want to see a trade policy that is balanced by encouraging competitiveness and having a policy that is conscientious.

The members opposite want a trade policy that allows unrestricted free trade in our country, that allows foreign companies with very low wages, no environmental standards and poor employment rules to have those goods come to our country and then compete with our companies and workers who try to respect those.

Could the hon. member comment on that aspect of trade?

Mr. Jim Maloway: Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely correct. He is talking about what happens when we have a race to the bottom. At the end of the day, if people recognized that this was going to happen, if they saw that it was not going to produce the results that we were looking for, we might have looked differently at it in the very beginning and gone with a more multilateral approach to trade agreements than what we did 20 years ago.

There is still time for us to make that shift, make that change and improve these trade agreements.

• (1745)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am here to participate in the debate on Bill C-8, which is about the implementation of the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the Agreement on the Environment between Canada and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the Agreement on Labour Cooperation between Canada and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

Mr. Speaker, you have given many warnings today. This morning, you often reminded us to stick to the text and the free trade agreement between Canada and Jordan. I will try my best. However, Canada has negotiated or is currently negotiating no fewer than 29 bilateral agreements on which the members of the House do not

necessarily agree. The agreement with Colombia is one of those bilateral agreements that has led to much discussion.

The Bloc Québécois will support the agreement between Canada and Jordan because it believes that Quebec has something to gain from it.

Jordan is a small country, but it has had significant economic growth for more than 10 years. It is now one of the most open and competitive markets in the Middle East. It does not have many natural resources, but its population is both very young and very educated. International trade is a major component of its development plan. As well, it is one of the Arab countries that has signed the most free trade agreements.

Jordan's two most important sectors are the pharmaceutical industry and the production of agricultural fertilizers, thanks to its large reserves of potash and phosphate.

Jordan is different because it has created special economic zones that attract a lot of foreign investment. These zones create a favourable environment for export. The very well-known Aqaba zone has a fixed 5% tax on most economic activities. That is a relatively attractive rate. There are no tariffs on imported goods, and companies pay no property taxes. Jordan has taken these measures to improve things for itself.

Even though Jordan's unemployment rate is relatively high, companies that set up in the zone can hire up to 70% of their workers from foreign countries. As such, foreign companies that set up in the zone can bring in workers from their own countries. Also, foreign companies can take 100% of their profits back to their home countries.

The major challenges facing Jordan's economy are its lack of water reserves and dependence on the foreign market for energy and fuel.

That shortage of water resources is very important to Quebec because it has vast water resources. The Bloc Québécois will ensure that Quebec's tremendous water resources are excluded from the agreement so that Quebecers remain in control of this resource.

• (1750)

Earlier, I mentioned that the primary purpose of this agreement was the export of Canadian agricultural products to Jordan. I also spoke about the shortage of water resources. Now, I will talk about Jordan's arid climate, which is not conducive to agriculture. Their agricultural sector has therefore been on the decline for a number of years, and represents only a very small part of their gross domestic product, around 2.4%.

For Canada, Jordan is just a small market, but we must realize that Quebec plays an important role in the total volume of Canadian exports to Jordan. Yes, I said that Quebec plays an important role in the total volume of Canadian exports. According to the Institut de la statistique du Québec, in 2008, 44.8% of all Canadian exports to Jordan originated in Quebec. This was an increase, since in 2007, that figure was 33.8%.

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The volume of this trade is minimal, considering the total value of Quebec exports to Jordan was only \$35 million. Quebec exports primarily copper products, followed very closely by pulp and paper. These two sectors represent \$25 million of the \$35 million of total Quebec exports to Jordan. We already have an open door when it comes to pulp and paper exports. We could perhaps move forward and continue to open up the market for our forestry industry.

As for imports of products from Jordan into Quebec, we import very few. A little less than \$8 million worth are imported into Quebec, and they are mostly limited to textiles and clothing and also some exotic fruits and nuts.

Why, then, would we support a free trade agreement between Canada and Jordan? Simply because there are other factors motivating this agreement, such as the importance of balancing our support in the region. Because Canada already has a free trade agreement with Israel, it would be good for us to sign one with Jordan, too.

Jordan is a small country that is constantly modernizing. This sends a clear message to the rest of the Middle East that we can do business with a country that does not engage in protectionism and navel-gazing.

As I said when I began my speech, the Bloc Québécois is very much in favour of this agreement, because it believes that the agreement could be good for Quebec. The Union des producteurs agricoles du Québec also believes that this is a good agreement that does not present any problems. Since the Jordanian agriculture sector is small, our farm producers will not likely be affected. Another factor I mentioned earlier should also be considered, and that is the possible development of a market for our pulp and paper industry. Because of its climate, Jordan has very little in the way of forest resources. We believe that Quebec's pulp and paper industry could benefit from increased opportunities in that country.

However, we do have some concerns about the growing number of bilateral agreements. I said earlier that Canada has negotiated no fewer than 29 bilateral agreements.

• (1755)

There is a difference between bilateral and multilateral agreements. Bilateral agreements are country-to-country agreements and are not subject to international standards.

Openness to trade and the establishment of international regulations to counter protectionism and protect investment are good things that the Bloc supports. Quebec is a trading nation. Our businesses, especially the high-tech firms, could not survive in the domestic market alone, and they know it. They need to export.

But it would be naive and wrong to say that all is well in the world of free trade agreements. While freer trade has led to greater wealth overall, it has also produced its share of losers.

Trade liberalization can only be profitable if it is guided by certain rules. We can already see the downside of unbridled, uncontrolled liberalization: heavy pressure on our industry, offshoring and trade agreements that are licence to exploit people and the environment in developing countries. This is one of the reasons we do not want

Canada to sign the free trade agreement with Colombia. We believe that this agreement is not good for the environment or for labour.

For that reason, the Bloc Québécois is proposing a change in Canada's trade priorities. Canada should now shift its focus from trade liberalization to creating a more level playing field. The Bloc Québécois believes that our trade policy must focus on fair globalization, not the shameless pursuit of profit at the expense of people and the environment. That means that we must not accept a trading system that results in the exploitation of poor countries and dumping in rich countries.

The absence of environmental or labour standards in trade agreements puts a great deal of pressure on our industries, mainly our traditional industries. It is very difficult for them to compete when products are made with no regard for basic social rights.

The Bloc Québécois believes that child labour, forced labour and the denial of the fundamental rights of workers is a form of unfair competition, just like export subsidies and dumping. There is what we call monetary dumping and there is also social dumping.

We make the assumption that, if a country wishes to benefit from free trade, it must conversely accept a certain number of basic rules, particularly in the area of social rights.

The Bloc Québécois is urging the federal government to revise its positions in trade negotiations in order to ensure that trade agreements include clauses ensuring compliance with international labour standards as well as respect for human rights and the environment.

In their current form, side agreements on minimum labour standards and environmental protection lack a binding mechanism that would make them truly effective.

A multipartite agreement is one where several countries are involved with a number of them having signed agreements that protect human rights, or fight against child labour or protect the environment. Hence, the union of countries automatically ensures that the agreement will ensure compliance in all these areas.

• (1800)

When we prepare a bilateral agreement, we often do so only to expand trade and make money. We often ignore the other aspects that should be included in an agreement. The Bloc Québécois feels that, in order to be credible on this issue, Canada should quickly sign on to the International Labour Organization's principal conventions against various forms of discrimination, forced labour and child labour, as well as those in support of the right to organize and collective bargaining.

The free trade agreement with Jordan is yet another proof that Canada has abandoned the multilateral approach. Trade promotes progress for everyone. However, even though a bilateral free trade agreement with a given country may indeed further liberalize trade, it does not allow us to apply rules to civilize trade. That can only be achieved in the context of multilateral trade.

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This is unfortunate, but the World Trade Organization recently examined Canada's trade policy and noted, with good reason, that:

...Canada's participation in negotiations and preferential trade agreements sparked some concerns about resources diverted from the multilateral trading system.

In light of this, the Bloc Québécois reiterates its confidence in the multilateral process. We believe this is the only forum in which countries can work towards adopting regulations that will foster fairer globalization.

Right now, when it comes to trade, the federal Conservative government tends to drop the multilateral approach, just like it is tempted to do with foreign affairs. Because it does not have a foreign affairs policy, it cannot have an international trade policy. However, the more we see it act—29 bilateral agreements with 29 countries—the more we realize that the government's policy is only about making money and establishing a trade policy, without taking into consideration agreements that could be negotiated to promote fair international trade.

Officials from the Department of International Trade and the Department of Industry admitted to the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology that they did not make any study to determine whether these agreements will benefit our economy. The House of Commons Standing Committee on International Trade even contemplated a free trade agreement with China. In 2005, Canadian imports of Chinese goods totalled \$32 billion and generated a \$26 billion trade deficit in Canada, or \$1,000 per capita. One wonders about a bilateral agreement that generates five times more imports than exports. One wonders where we are headed.

The Bloc Québécois will only support future bilateral free trade agreements if it believes they will benefit Quebec's economy. This agreement could be politically viable, and could do some good for Quebec, enabling more development of its pulp and paper and forestry industries.

We will therefore vote in favour of this agreement.

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to draw the member's attention to the fact that there are as many as 25 honour crimes in Jordan every year, and while the monarch and the royal family are certainly opposed to them, the fact of the matter is that the perpetrators of some of these killings receive an average of six months to one year in jail. This is where essentially if a female, because it is almost 99% female, brings shame to the family she is killed. It is permitted under Jordanian law, article 98 and 340 of the penal code.

I would like to ask the member to recognize that and probably agree that when this bill gets to committee, the committee will look at all aspects of the bill, including the human rights record in Jordan, which we have said over and over is not as bad as we find in Colombia. Nevertheless, we should look at the human rights record and certainly pay some attention to this whole issue of honour killings and what the Jordanian government is doing to eliminate them.

● (1805)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Mr. Speaker, I thank the NDP member for his question.

The Bloc Québécois is very concerned about this issue. It is clear that there is a world of difference between Jordan and Colombia. These two countries cannot be compared. Colombia is much worse than Jordan. That is why the Bloc Québécois is systematically opposed to the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement.

Why are we agreeing to examine the agreement with Jordan? Partly because it has a young population that is a bit more educated, and partly because the country has already implemented some mechanisms to deal better with human rights issues.

However, we are pleased that the committee will examine this issue before it returns to the House, because the Bloc Québécois absolutely insists that this free trade agreement contain clauses requiring that minimum standards on human rights, labour rights and respect for the environment be met. That is important to us. We trust the committee to examine the issue and take care of it.

[*English*]

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, earlier in the day, on behalf of the Liberal Party, the member for Kings—Hants was advancing a theory that essentially stated that our trade policy should be based on the principle that if we engage economically with nations, somehow this will automatically have a positive effect on their human rights record. Of course, under this theory, there really is no practical reason why any country would improve its human rights record and there would be really no criteria to apply toward any country with which we trade. We could under that theory trade with any country in the world that has the absolutely most repressive record on any subject and just hope it would improve.

I am wondering what my hon. colleague's thoughts are with respect to when Canada should extend preferential economic relations with countries and what we should be expecting from those countries in terms of their human rights, environmental standards and labour standards as a condition before we trade, or should we have no conditions at all as the Liberal Party apparently thinks is the case.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question, one that is extremely important and allows me to talk about something that I have not yet had the opportunity to address.

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In my opinion, as a country, Canada has certain responsibilities and Quebec also has certain responsibilities. Canada needs to assume its responsibilities. Canada has not signed all the agreements concerning human rights, labour rights, protection of workers and protection of children. When a supposedly civilized and democratic country, such as Canada, concludes an agreement with another country where human rights are violated, where child labour is used, where unionists are disposed of by killing them or putting them in prison, and where human rights are not respected, it is Canada's responsibility to ensure that that country has signed the convention for the protection of human rights and the convention for the protection of workers' rights. We must refuse to conclude an agreement with such a country until that country attains some degree of social justice.

On the other hand, we must be careful. We should not tell another country what to do or how to address human rights. The government, in other words Canada, has not taken an official position on Cuba, for example. It is not up to us to tell Cuba what to do about human rights. At present, there is still an embargo against Cuba because three countries did not sign the UN convention recognizing Cuba as a nation—Canada, New Zealand and the United States, along with a few small islands. In my opinion, it is not up to us to tell another country what to do. However, we need to assume our responsibilities, stand up and help another country implement human rights policies.

• (1810)

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Maloway: Mr. Speaker, I want to follow up with the member regarding the honour killings.

The whole idea of honour killings is disturbing. We have to recognize first of all that Jordan is certainly not the only place where this happens. This is fairly widespread. We have to deal with it in a much broader area than just with Jordan.

Children born out of wedlock are considered a product of crime. Women cannot claim custody for such children and the children are placed in government care until they are 18 years of age. A divorced woman loses custody of her legitimate children if she remarries. Men can pass their nationality to their foreign wives and children, while Jordanian women married to foreigners are not entitled to have the same right.

The member agrees that we have to deal with this whole issue at committee. We have a standard here that is certainly not good. I am quite surprised that it has taken until the year 2010 for human rights organizations to deal with the issue.

The member may recall that just a few months ago there was a suggested honour killing here in Ontario involving some people who were drowned in a car. That was the first I had heard of honour killings. I have to admit it is disturbing that that type of activity still continues and is accepted in some areas of the world. Almost 100% of the victims are women.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Mr. Speaker, it is hard to give a brief response on such a broad subject. I could talk about women or honour killings. I could talk about many things.

First, I would just say that I trust the committee that is going to discuss this. Second, who are we to judge? Third, we, in the Bloc Québécois strive for the inclusion of all persons. We can accept them independently. Members of all nations are welcome in Quebec.

Of course there are limits, but I trust the committee. The committee will talk about this. I think we can work something out with Jordan.

• (1815)

[*English*]

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to debate this bill regarding the free trade agreement between Jordan and Canada, and talk about it from the perspective of a trade deal that is flawed. However, all of us are in agreement to send the bill to committee to make it better.

Why is the agreement here in the first place? Why are we talking about the implementation of it rather than how we develop trade agreements? It seems that we do everything backward. The government goes about negotiating a trade deal without asking for input from this side of the House. It then brings it back and asks us to implement it. Then we get into these debates.

The government seems to be intent on doing bilateral agreements because the vast majority of its latest free trade attempts have been bilateral attempts, not multilateral attempts. That being the case, I would suggest to the government that it make it easy on all of us.

The government should bring it to the House and let us debate the labour aspects, the environmental aspects and the whole trade bill itself. Then the implementation of it should be pretty simple. The bill will be sent to committee. The committee will work on it and fine-tune it. The bill will come back to the House and we will vote for it, because we will have figured out what it is we want, rather than there being a one-sided approach where the government says it wants to do it one way, and we end up in a protracted debate. The government refuses to negotiate trade bills and come to the House and debate them. The government simply goes ahead and does it and says to accept it or not, and that is the end of it. That to me does not seem to be enlightened thinking. It simply causes government members a lot of heartache and slows the process down.

Notwithstanding that, a number of colleagues in the House today have mentioned the amount of trade that actually happens between Jordan and Canada. It does not necessarily have to be a large trade deal to go ahead with it. Does it always need to be of huge benefit to one country over the other? If it is not a big trade deal should we forget about it? That is not the case at all.

Government Orders

In the case of Canada and Jordan, we are looking at trying to establish a trade pattern that should be of mutual benefit to the citizens of the two countries. We should gain something from it and so should the Jordanians. It should not be a predatory process. We know what it is like to be exploited. All we have to do is look at NAFTA, the free trade agreement with the Americas, the free trade agreement with the U.S., and of course the most recent one which the government decided to enter into, the government procurement deal. We know all about being on the receiving end of that predatory bird picking away at us and devouring us, because with those three trade agreements, we have been on the short end of the stick.

When we talk to folks in committee about the latest trade agreements, and the most recent one was bilateral, no one from the department could tell us how much we would get, how much was available to us, whether it was a net benefit to the Canadian worker, whether it was a net benefit to the Canadian economy, none of those things. Yet the government went ahead and signed the agreement anyway when it came to government procurement. It is simply amazing.

I do not think we want to do that to the Jordanians, being the folks who we are who believe that a sense of fair play should rule when it comes to entering into these agreements. Maybe we have decided that we should take advantage of someone else because we have been taken advantage of so many times in the other deals and we have decided to push it. That is not what we want to do on this side of the House. We want a fair deal with the Jordanians and I think the Jordanians want a fair trade deal with us, but we need to help.

Folks have talked about the human rights abuses in other parts of the world when it comes to bilaterals, and the example of Colombia has been used, but that is not the debate today. Clearly, when we look at the human rights practices in Jordan, a number of them require attention. As recent as March of this year there is a report by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor on the abuses that happen in Jordan. It is the right of Jordanians to decide for themselves, but it is our right to say no to the trade deal if we do not agree with what they do internally.

● (1820)

If child labour is something the Jordanians want, then I guess it is not our right to tell them they cannot do it. However, it is our right not to have a free trade deal with them. Child labour actually exists in Jordan. In this country we decided that child labour should be abolished and we did something about it. If we are going to have a free trade deal with the Jordanians, we have to tell them we do not put children to work in this country. We certainly have young people who work in the summer to get work experience and make a few dollars as they head toward university and college, but we do not ask kids under the age of 12 to go to work on a full-time basis. It is against the law in this country.

I think we accept that this is not what we want to see happen around the world either.

It is not this state's right to tell that state what it should do. Again, I emphasize it is in our country's ability to say no to the trade deal.

When we look at the statistics, it ends up being close to, according to the government's numbers, 32,000 child labourers in Jordan. The

population of Jordan is only a few million. It is not a hugely populated country.

The law says that it forbids children under the age of 16 years of age, except as apprentices. Last time I checked, apprentices actually were. Reports of child labour are being substantiated, such as children who work in mechanical repair, agriculture, fishing, construction, hotels, restaurants, as well as the informal sectors, street vendors, carpenters, blacksmiths, domestic workers and painters and in small family businesses.

When we look at that, we have to ask ourselves this. Is that something we want to allow and is that something a free trade deal might exacerbate? It is a legitimate question to ask. Or is that something a free trade deal may help put an end to?

We do not know the answers to those questions because we have not asked them yet. We did not put that into the free trade agreement in the labour piece of the agreement, which we took out and put to the side. We do not have a clause in there that says, "thou shall not have child labourers". Maybe we should have asked that question. Maybe we should have bargained with it. Maybe we need it to go to committee to ensure that we get it and if we do not get it, we say no. That is the decision we will have to make as we send it to committee and work on it. If the end result is that we do not believe we can tell Jordan, as a state, that it should not have child labourers, then I guess we should say no to the free trade deal.

Again, I will quote the statistics. In 2008 the Department of Statistics estimated the number of working children between the ages of 5 to 17 at more than 32,000. Activists in the country said that they believed it to be higher. It is hard to document child labourers. Not too many parents will tell us their child is involved in child labour. Of course if it is illegal, not many companies are going to say they have children working for them. They do not want to get caught, so why would they tell us that?

We need to ask that fundamental question. I think all members in the House agree with me and would be proud to stand in their place and say that they do not believe children should be abused and worked before the age that we would understand is the normal working age. I do not think there is a member in the House who would say they believe in child labour and child exploitation. I know that to be true.

If that is the case, then we ought to say no to this free trade agreement until we are satisfied that the Jordanians are putting a mechanism in place to end it and that can be substantiated.

Let me also talk about labour rates. Labour rates are an important component of trade deals. There are certain industries that the major component of costs is the labour rate. When we look at the national minimum wage, as of January 1, it increased from 110 dinars a month to 150 dinars per month. What does that mean in Canadian wages? It means it went from \$156 a month to \$213 a month. Ostensibly it went to about \$7 a day, give or take, depending upon the month.

Government Orders

●(1825)

If we are in a competitive agreement and suggest that Canadian wages can be competitive at \$7 a day when I know in the province of Ontario the minimum wage just went up to \$10.25 an hour, I am not quite sure how that works out. I am not sure how we square that circle.

When we look at all these things, we start talking about who is being exploited and are we being complicit in that exploitation. Do trade deals help the exploitation and those who exploit them, or do we, indeed, put an end to it? When I look at the side agreement on labour, I do not see anything in there that talks about how we would get rid of those who exploit and what we would do to end it.

There are nice things about telling Jordan it is not allowed to do certain things, but if it does and it gets caught and convicted, it will get fined. That is of course if it gets through the judiciary properly because the judiciary has some issues, which I will speak to in a minute. How much the fine is no one is really sure because it has not been determined. There is no maximum or minimum, it would just be subject to a fine.

If it happens to be a foreign worker, my guess is that person will be deported rather than fined. When we look at foreign workers, we find they have less rights than those who are born in Jordan. They end up with no rights when it comes to the labour force. What happens is they get deported if they complain. Foreign workers quite often are detained. In fact, the Jordanian government has admitted that what has happened to foreign workers is criminal, it needs to do something about it and it is making other attempts.

We at least need to look at the Jordanian king because the government emanates from him. It truly does because the king chooses the prime minister, the cabinet, he has a say with certain mayors of large cities, he dissolves Parliament and calls Parliament. Even though there is an elected House, its members do not have the ability to dissolve themselves or even ask to be dissolved. In this House—

An hon. member: We do not ask, either. We get dissolved.

Mr. Malcolm Allen: The government does not really ask us. At least the Prime Minister, as an elected member, has to go to someone else to ask, whereas in Jordan the king dissolves it or calls it if that is what he wants. He appoints the cabinet and so it is behold to the king because the cabinet is not elected.

There is an autocratic piece at the top that runs the show and a democratized piece at the bottom that really does not have a lot of power. When it comes time to talk about who is actually running the country, it is in very few hands appointed by one person.

We are talking about whether it is our right to tell the king of Jordan that we think he should democratize more. I guess it is all right to ask. It is his right to tell us no thanks and then, again, I reiterate that it is our choice to say no thanks to a bilateral free trade agreement with Jordan if we do not see the fulfillment of the things being talked about.

Some colleagues have talked about what has been euphemistically called honour killings, with which I take great umbrage. How anyone could suggest that killing a woman is honour based is

beyond me. There is no honour in killing another human being, let alone killing a daughter, niece, sister or wife. There is no honour ever in killing another human being. Yet we still see so-called honour killings in Jordan.

I use the term because its judiciary uses it. In fact, its judiciary has now set up a separate tribunal to talk about how it will punish those who have committed so-called honour killings. That is a type of murder. That is what it is and let us call it what it is in the House. It is murder. I know my friends across the way have a penchant to talk about law and order and what they want to see happen in our country. It seems to me that when it comes to the so-called honour killings that the Jordanians talked about, surely the Conservatives want, like all of us, to make sure that it does not happen in Jordan when it comes to the free trade agreement. We perhaps would want to say something to them about it.

●(1830)

Let me mention a couple of these horrific incidents so we can put this in context.

On March 20 of last year, a man beat to death his 19-year-old daughter with the assistance of two of her brothers. The woman's uncle reportedly had seen her wearing makeup. She was supposed to be running errands but he saw her in another location. This was a child. I have three children of my own who are older than that. This child was murdered by her father and her brothers for wearing makeup and for being in the wrong place when she should have been running errands.

Jordanians have the audacity to call that an honour killing. It was brutality at its utmost. This has to end. We have to make sure it ends. We should never have an agreement with a state that allows this to happen. That is not our role in the House. Canadians would never stand for this. Why would we enter into an agreement with a country that allows this to happen? It allows this to happen because of the way it treats those who perpetrate this kind of brutality.

We have heard others talk about people getting as little as six months in custody for crimes like that which I have just described. That is unbelievable. The Jordanians say they are correcting that.

No doubt some colleagues will point out that the last two individuals who did that received 15 years. Is that just punishment for what really was the brutal murder of a young woman? Does that seem like justice to us? If not, then why are we signing a trade deal with a country that thinks it is just?

Is economics just about economics? Is this just about turning a blind eye to all the abuses that happen? Is that we are saying? Is that where we have gone in the sense of making money? As long as we make money, does it not matter what they do? Will we just not see it? Will we put up our hands and shield our eyes from the horror? I hope we have not gone there.

It would be a shame if we as parliamentarians have decided that as long as there is a net benefit to some company that it does not matter about the people who live in Jordan. If a company is going to make out okay, then it is okay for us to sign the deal. I hope we do not go there.

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We have to start looking at what is really critical to all of this. Trade deals are about reciprocal agreements between countries. They are about benefits to both countries. We are helping the Jordanians through trade. We are talking about a level playing field. Do we want to enter into a deal that is not on a level playing field?

If we are going to talk about fair trade agreements, which those of us at this end of the House talk about on a continual basis, then we need to talk about a level playing field. We need to enter these agreements as equal partners where people living in both countries will benefit.

Trade deals should be about Canadians, the folks we represent, and the citizens of the countries with which we negotiate. They should not be about some corporation, big or small. This trade deal should be about benefiting Canadians and Jordanians. Trade deals should not be about the CEO who receives the huge bonus because the company received a deal.

Let me talk about a few other instances that we have seen when it comes to academic freedoms and the freedoms of students. One of the things I have heard colleagues talk about here on a regular basis is the whole sense of free thought. We believe young folks should have the ability to go to university. We believe a university should be a place for free thought. That does not happen.

• (1835)

Members of the academic community believe that the ongoing intelligence presence in academic institutions, including the monitoring of academic conferences and lectures, continues to this day.

Mr. Speaker, there is a lot more I could talk about, but you have decided that my time for debate is up and I will respect that.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member was right to point out the abuses that are detailed by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor for 2008. We have to point out to members that this report is authored by the United States Department of State. We are quoting from a very reputable organization. For example, the report states:

Violence and abuse against women continued, including widespread domestic violence, numerous honor crimes, and spousal rape. In rural areas violence against women was reported more frequently than in major cities; however, women's rights activists speculated that many incidents in cities went unreported.

We have talked about the roughly 25 honour killings a year in Jordan, in which 99% of the victims are women. This issue is not under control at this point. That is why when this bill gets to committee we are asking the committee to put an effort into ascertaining the situation regarding the honour killings and to act accordingly. Would the member be in agreement with that? Does he have any other ideas as to how we might get to the bottom of this issue?

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is quite right. We need to delve into this question. We need to ask ourselves the fundamental question about how we help the Jordanians put an end to it. There are many other things happening in Jordan.

The report talks about student rights and student democracy. In our country, students have the right to elect their own student leaders in their universities. When it comes to Jordan, security bodies are

interfering in student elections. Security personnel reportedly told students for whom to vote. That is hardly free and fair.

When it comes to freedom of assembly, the law was amended for public gatherings to say that organizations did not need approval to hold routine internal meetings and activities. However, routine public meetings, including workshops and training sessions, required approval. Imagine if the Conservative Party wanted to hold a workshop for the next election and needed our approval before it could hold one. If we felt like being nice that week, we would say yes. If we did not feel like being nice, we would say no.

It seems to me that in a society that has free rein and free democracy, one would have the ability to do that. Hopefully, they would allow them to do that.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if a country does not have economic development, its people do not have hope. Certainly, it is one of the great challenges of the Middle East, where there is a huge swath of uneducated males without jobs. That provides fertile ground for people to be twisted into adopting an Islamo-fascist position that can be used against people in their own country and against us. The best bulwark against terrorism is the ability to provide individuals with jobs that will allow them to take care of themselves and their communities. In doing so, they become contributors to their society, not destroyers of it.

Does my colleague not think that a way to square the circle of the very legitimate human rights points he makes is to build a mandatory reporting system perhaps involving a third party that would enable the Jordanian government to provide yearly human rights feedback on the challenges within that country?

• (1840)

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Mr. Speaker, it never escapes me that somehow we always just want to suggest, if we have an economic deal, that somehow folks will lift themselves up when it comes to human rights.

Human rights do not lift themselves up because of economics. That might play a role. The human rights of a country come up because of its belief and its fundamental sense that we should look after one another, that somehow people are as equal as each other, not less so, and that government institutions have a huge role to play in all of that. It does not depend on just needing to have a strong economy.

We can look around the world and find economies that are less strong but yet do not have the same human rights abuses we find ourselves engaged in.

There is a bit of a chicken and egg situation when it comes to the economy. Should we have a free trade deal and then hope that human rights come up and then we will just inspect it? Or do we suggest that countries build the capacity within their own state, where they respect the rule of law, where they respect their citizens no matter what their beliefs and what their differences are. If they do that internally, do we then say we are on an equal footing now and we will go ahead and develop an economic relationship?

Government Orders

The economy, economic relationships and human rights are not in lockstep. If that were true, then why is it that when we were not doing as well in this country, many years ago, decades ago when our human rights were on a par with most of the rest of the world, why were we not an abysmal failure when it came to our human rights record all those years ago, notwithstanding the aboriginal question, which is still an abysmal black mark on our record today?

Mr. Lee Richardson (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was almost scooped there by the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca with a very good question.

I will direct my question to the member for Welland, who often sits on the free trade committee. We are always delighted to have him there and not just because the regular member is not there.

I want to ask him this, though, because he has made an impassioned plea with regard to the parallel agreements on labour and on human rights in the agreement. I have not heard much in the debate from that corner of the House all day about the trade side of the agreement, which is fundamentally the main part of the agreement. It is a trade agreement.

Does the member have any comments on the trade side, or has he had a look at it?

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Mr. Speaker, in response to my colleague, the chair of the international trade committee, yes, we have looked at the trade agreement. We have certainly done that.

The amount of trade we actually do with Jordan is around \$92 million, give or take, and it has dropped. But this is the trade imbalance between the Jordanians and us. If we go back to the \$92 million, \$64 million was in one direction, from us to them, which only left them with \$28 million coming back the other way.

Is it really a balanced trade agreement? I think the Jordanians would probably say no. In our case, I guess we can say we are the winners. Then again, winning by a few million dollars and losing by billions of dollars in the other trade deals we have done says to me that free trade does not work. It does not work for Jordanians and it did not work for us, and at the end of the day we need to go back to the committee and hammer it out.

I am sure the hon. member who is the chair of that committee will help us hammer out what we believe is a fair trade agreement. For once we will see a fair trade agreement, not a free trade agreement, come out of that committee.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member for Welland is one of the most learned members on trade issues in the House. He, like other members of the NDP caucus, has actually read the agreement. What we have seen time and time again is Conservatives trying to push bad agreements, whether it is the softwood sellout, the shipbuilding sellout or the egregiously bad Colombian agreement, which is a complete sellout of human rights.

My question for the hon. member for Welland is this. Why does he think Conservatives keep foisting these bad agreements on the House of Commons? Is it because they do not really understand what is in the agreements?

● (1845)

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is absolutely right.

As I said earlier, if the government brought the agreement to the House and allowed the House to say, “Here is what we ought to be doing in an agreement”, we would have a better-balanced agreement, rather than bringing an implementation bill to the House and saying, “Let us just implement what we have already done”. Let us debate the agreement first and then take it out and we will find ourselves with a better-balanced agreement and actually better agreements.

This side of the House would be proactive with the government. We know the Liberals are on side when it comes to free trade. At the end of the day, we would balance that out and give the government a fair trade agreement.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I sense a lot of enthusiasm here. If I were to have my way, I would seek unanimous consent to speak for 20 minutes instead of five. That is what I was asked to do at first. Nevertheless, I will start now and perhaps come back later.

I am pleased to take part in this debate on the free trade agreement between Canada and Jordan, a country of roughly 6 million inhabitants. Hon. members probably heard some of my Bloc Québécois colleagues speak today on this issue. The Bloc is in favour in principle of Bill C-8, which is identical to Bill C-57, which was introduced at first reading stage in December 2009, before prorogation.

Mr. Speaker, there is still a debate going on behind me, but that is all right because I know you pay close attention and most people watching us on television are also more interested in what is happening here than in what is happening behind me.

Although Jordan is currently a minor market, and trade volumes between our two countries are small, this agreement will send a signal to other Middle Eastern countries that want to develop better economic relations with the west.

Jordan is modernizing its government apparatus and focusing heavily on international trade to support its economic growth because it has few natural resources. A free trade agreement with Canada could help this emerging economy make progress.

We have heard a number of arguments about human rights. The committee has to review all of the ins and outs of this type of agreement. That is why we want to send the bill to committee to be sure we have all of the information.

Canada signed a free trade agreement with Israel, a country bordering Jordan. An agreement with Jordan would demonstrate our balanced interests in the region given the tense political situation—as everyone knows—between Israel and the rest of the Middle East.

Adjournment Proceedings

The potential trade opportunities are in the agricultural sector. As the Bloc Québécois critic for this portfolio, I have taken a special interest in this aspect of the agreement. Agriculture is not well developed in Jordan and poses no threat to Quebec producers. Its forestry resources are limited. This would provide a new opportunity for Quebec's pulp and paper industry, which already accounts for the largest share of Quebec's exports to Jordan.

Pulp and paper and copper are Canada's leading exports to Jordan. We have an opportunity to import a number of agri-food products from Jordan. We will figure out how these trades can be more beneficial to both parties. Unfortunately, I do not think we will be able to export our pork to Jordan.

The committee will have to consider one specific aspect that I am personally concerned about. Despite the fact that natural surface and ground water in liquid, gaseous or solid state is excluded from the agreement by the enabling statute, the Bloc Québécois noted that this exclusion is not written into the text of the agreement itself. In committee, we will make sure that Quebec's vast water resources are clearly excluded from the agreement so that control over their development remains in the hands of Quebecers.

In comparison with the rest of Canada, Quebec currently does the most business with Jordan, although the numbers are not overly large.

This agreement would cover the export of agricultural products to Jordan from Canada. Low water reserves and an arid climate keep Jordan from developing a significant agriculture sector. It could be useful for Jordan to enter into a free trade agreement with us.

Jordan represents a relatively small market. As I mentioned, Quebec already provides a large percentage of total Canadian exports to Jordan.

I have statistics from Quebec's Institut de la statistique. They are from 2008, so they are relatively recent. According to these statistics, 44.8% of total Canadian exports to Jordan come from Quebec. In 2007, the number was 33.8%. In other words, there was an 11% increase between 2007 and 2008.

• (1850)

The total value of Quebec exports to Jordan reached only \$35 million in 2008, while Canada's total trade reached about \$92 million.

Earlier I spoke about the importance of studying this agreement in committee. I should say that the Conservative government is currently choosing to enter into bilateral agreements, although it has always been recognized that multilateral agreements are far superior in terms of protecting environmental, labour and social rights. That is the path we should be taking.

This should be taken into consideration when this bill is studied in committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member will have another 14 minutes the next time.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on March 9, 2010, I asked the government why it was handing over even more environmental responsibilities from agencies legally mandated to protect the environment to agencies mandated to promote industrial development. In other words, why is the government putting the foxes in charge of the henhouse?

The recent budget clearly reveals the government's agenda to diminish the federal role in environmental assessments and regulatory controls over major projects when it declared its intent to "modernize the regulatory process".

The first step by the government was creating the MPMO within the natural resources department. Despite several decades of a very effective role by the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency in coordinating environmental assessments and providing information on environmental review processes, the government in its wisdom established another agency to do precisely that role, but more from the perspective of pro the project. That was the first step.

The second step was in last year's budget where the government took a piece of the responsibility for federal environmental assessment under the Navigable Waters Protection Act and, instead of coming to an open public review to the House through the budget, did away with that responsibility for environmental impact assessment.

This time around, in the budget, the government is removing Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency oversight over nuclear and major energy projects, shifting coordination of those projects to the National Energy Board and the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission.

In this year's budget, the government took an even greater broad brush exempting all of its infrastructure projects, recreation projects, projects on first nations lands, energy retrofits and rural infrastructure.

Absurdly, the Minister of the Environment may actually exempt a project that is exempted from federal assessment if that project may cause significant adverse environmental effects. But of course we can never figure that out because the government has already exempted the projects from environmental impact assessments.

Who has recommended this? When I asked the question, the reply from the minister was that a number of people have recommended these massive reforms to diminish the federal role in environmental impact assessments and to transfer that role from a long-standing federal environmental assessment agency, which has had a very magnanimous role, a very important role in co-operating with provincial governments and making sure that they were coordinated, to other agencies.

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The minister responded that the commissioner for sustainable development, in his 2009 audit report, recommended this very change. His report, however, makes no such recommendation. He does concur that there could be more timely delivery and a screening of projects and so forth, and he recommends, as does the agency itself, that these matters ought to be reviewed by the parliamentary committee in their statutory required review which is coming up in several months.

The question that I would have again to the government is, why is it superceding the very review processes that are set out in federal law for the parliamentary committee to review changes to federal assessments, including law and policy, and instead doing it through a budget bill where there is very diminished opportunity for public input and comment?

•(1855)

Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, au contraire. I respect the member highly but she has it wrong, very wrong. She would have Canadians performing environmental assessments when they paint benches in Parks Canada, so she has it wrong.

This government is committed to environmental protection and sustainable development. Environmental assessments help us meet those objectives. Improving projects designed to prevent environmental harm before construction is both cost effective and prudent.

Budget 2010 will reduce duplication that results when the environmental assessment process and another federal process with public hearings apply to the same project. It gets rid of the duplication. Duplication is wasteful. It diverts taxpayers dollars away from the concrete actions that protect the environment. It adds unnecessary costs to the development of the projects that bring investments and jobs to Canada. That is what Canadians want: good, clean, green jobs.

Anyone who supports unnecessary duplication like the NDP is against strong environmental protection, investments and jobs for Canadians. A few facts are necessary to set the record straight.

Every year the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission and the National Energy Board conduct dozens of environmental assessments of large, complex projects. That is not new. They have done so for 15 years.

The National Energy Board has 50 expert environmental staff engaged in this important work. It has a long record of hearing and evaluating environmental evidence along with safety, technical, economic and cultural information. The board makes significant efforts to facilitate public participation and that of aboriginal Canadians. Public hearings are held as close as possible to the affected communities.

The Nuclear Safety and Control Act states that the mission of the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission is to protect the health, safety and security of persons, and the environment. The commission has 40 expert staff devoted to environmental assessment and environmental protection. It is a leader in ensuring public participation opportunities are part of every environmental assessment.

There are special cases when a review panel appointed by the Minister of the Environment under the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act is used for a project because of the high potential for significant environmental effects and public concern.

Under the initiatives of budget 2010, the Minister of the Environment will use his power, where appropriate, to allow the public hearing process of the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission and the National Energy Board to substitute for a review panel when the project is also regulated by one of these bodies.

The Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission and the National Energy Board have public hearings. They are well versed in applying the act and it only makes common sense to use these processes to the extent possible.

This authority for submission was established by Parliament when the act passed in 1992. The fundamentals of environmental assessment are not changing and the requirements of the act will continue to be met.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, contrary to what the member alleges, I would like to suggest to the House that, in fact, what the government is doing is creating duplication. We now have the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency in Canada whose singular role is to coordinate among the various federal agencies. So it is now creating three agencies we are supposed to coordinate.

The one thing that the Commissioner for Sustainable Development did recommend strongly in his 2009 report was that we should give the mandatory power to that agency to require the various agencies to actually respond in a timely fashion and that is what is causing the delays.

Another thing I would point is, yes, from time to time the National Energy Board does provide intervenor funding, but let me point out to the House the difference. In the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, where there is an environmental impact assessment, there is a mandatory obligation to provide public funding.

In the amendments in the new budget bill it is optional that those two authorities may provide intervenor funding. So, I do not call that a very fair system. It shows very clearly that we are going to have an unfair system when we are dealing with international pipelines and international exported power.

•(1900)

Mr. Mark Warawa: Mr. Speaker, two blue ribbon panels have called for greater use of the substitution mechanism.

In 2004 the External Advisory Committee on Smart Regulation appointed by the previous government recommended this approach. In 2008 the Competition Policy Review Panel heard that improving certainty and timeliness, and reducing duplication for environmental assessment is key.

In 2006 a pilot substitution was used so that the National Energy Board hearings replaced a review panel for the Emera Brunswick Pipeline in New Brunswick. An evaluation of this effort by the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency concluded that the substitution process was a great success.

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AIRLINE SECURITY

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I preface my remarks this evening with the comment that while noble, interesting, exciting and tremendously fulfilling, our work as members of Parliament is also challenging and stressful. If the actual content of our work was not enough, the sheer volume puts huge physical demands on us as we attempt to meet, balance and fulfill our work obligations in Ottawa, as well as in our ridings.

I can only imagine the additional pressures under which ministers must operate, so I approach the question of the behaviour of the Minister of Veterans Affairs at the Ottawa International Airport last month with both humility and, frankly, compassion. While my concern may seem personal, it is not meant at all in that way.

My concern is for a creeping illness that I think has taken over the government. Every government has a degree of “ministeritis” and that is a sense of inflated ego that happens with a swelling that seems to take place when people get appointed to cabinet. However, there seems to be a greater problem and I am going to call it “ministerialosis”.

“Ministerialosis” is part of that outrageous behaviour that we saw the Minister of State for the Status of Women participate in at the Charlottetown Airport last month. It includes the impulsive and somewhat demeaning behaviour of the Minister of Veterans Affairs in Ottawa. He was questioning the integrity of security staff.

However, “ministerialosis” is more than that. It actually is a failure of cabinet ministers to remember they are representatives of the Crown. They are part of the public service of this country dedicated to and offering themselves to public service, the very best of what we have to offer.

“Ministerialosis” has a sense of isolationism. It is the systematic arrogance of ministers to the Crown who have lost touch with common people. They sense that they are beyond the rules and above the law. They think that people no longer care about the truth or are not smart enough to know it when they are being misled.

They have the insatiable desire to hold on to power by politicizing everything that they do and by appealing to the lowest common values and characteristics among us. It demeans people. It is not what government is meant to be about. Public service is a noble calling.

The good news is that “ministerialosis” is actually a treatable disorder. Sometimes isolation is necessary. It may be that the Prime Minister needs to offer a hard pill that will be difficult to swallow. Sometimes it is a time out. Unfortunately, the Prime Minister has failed in this matter of health as much as in other matters of health, but it is to his detriment, the detriment of the government, and the detriment of Canada.

Each of us come here as public servants and in the end all we have to offer is ourselves, our integrity, our best intentions. We need to rise up above the stress, rise beyond what is happening in our lives to offer the very best to the Crown, to the government, and the people of Canada.

● (1905)

Mr. Greg Kerr (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it may be a debate in which I did not necessarily want to get involved but I feel compelled to do so because I know the gentleman opposite thinks he is a wit, and I believe he is half right. He takes on an issue here, uses cute words and makes up little stories as he goes along. If we are doing new terms, I would use the term “pomposity” to describe how he approaches things. I have seen him in action at committees and different places and I know he has a huge respect for his own ego and his own place in the world.

However, if he takes on somebody in public office who works hard on behalf of Canadians and does these devious little side trips he goes on, he not only does a disservice to the minister he is talking about, but actually to himself. A little reflection in the mirror would probably do him a lot of good and a few years in public office may help him in that regard. Who knows, somewhere down the road he may be in a position where he fills one of these offices and may regret the fact that he played around and poked fun at things that he knows in his heart are not accurate.

We know the minister is a gentleman. We also know that at no point did he request any preferential treatment. We also know that he apologized to anybody he might have offended. We also know that he strongly supports the airport security rules, unequivocally. The member opposite understands that and knows that.

It is the lack of respect he has for other members in the House that disturbs me. I do not know why he would go on this way instead of bringing forth something important, dynamic and worthwhile for the people of the country that we both serve. Since we are both involved in veterans affairs issues, he could have talked about many things that could take place and should take place because he knows the Minister of Veterans Affairs is very interested in making the kinds of change that are necessary as we move forward and face the many issues that particularly younger veterans are facing.

Just on this point, I will not speak at length at all. I just want to share how very disappointed I am in him. I really thought there was something more dynamic coming out tonight, something that was intelligent, not pretending to be intelligent, something that was worthwhile for the great place in which we live and something constructive as we move forward as representatives of the Canadian people. My disappointment is real and I hope in his closing comments he will try to adjust that slightly in a more positive way.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: Mr. Speaker, that is precisely why I wanted to raise this issue tonight. The Minister of Veterans Affairs is a man of integrity, and I have seen that, but he failed that day severely, which puts his work on behalf of veterans in jeopardy. That is my concern. My concern is that bad behaviour, although, and I want to be clear, an understandable mistake that day, it does not make it right.

The apology came too late and only after being found out. That is not good enough. It is simply not good enough behaviour because we need to rise above that for the good of the hard work which we do and which I regularly do and am happy to do.

Adjournment Proceedings

Mr. Greg Kerr: Mr. Speaker, I suppose I do need to respond again. I thought maybe he would end on a high note and perhaps even apologize for raising this issue out of the gutter but obviously that is where he will leave himself, down there.

I have said all I want to say about him. I will conclude by saying that I am very proud to be the parliamentary secretary to that minister. I know the work and the hours he is putting in on behalf of our veterans. I can only hope the member opposite will spend even a small part of his time and effort to represent the veterans in a positive way because they deserve the very best from all of us.

[*Translation*]

JUSTICE

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that means that we can now go to the airport and throw a tantrum or try to sneak bottles of tequila and that is all right.

In any event, on March 18, 2010, I asked the Minister of Justice a question. I would like to ask the question again.

Mr. Speaker, in 2008, two full-time Nova Scotia Supreme Court justice positions, which had been occupied by bilingual justices, were filled with unilingual anglophone justices. There is now only a single bilingual justice in the court.

Two other positions will need to be filled soon in Yarmouth and Sydney, which have a significant proportion of francophones.

Will the Minister of Justice ensure that representatives of the francophone and Acadian communities in Nova Scotia are part of the nominating committee, and will he promise to appoint two bilingual justices to the court?

The Conservative government says that it respects our country's two official languages. As members know, I presented a bill, that is subject to a vote on Wednesday, requiring the appointment of bilingual judges to the Supreme Court of Canada. I am not asking that judges be Francophone, but that they be bilingual. I am certain that in Nova Scotia, and elsewhere in Canada, there are English judges who are bilingual.

My question was on the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia. What is more, the Acadian francophone community is asking to be part of the nominating committee. The end of the minister's response was:

We encourage minority language communities to apply for judicial appointments. It is very important to this country and certainly to the judiciary itself.

If the minister wants people to apply, then it is important to listen to the francophone community of Nova Scotia. What was the reason for this? Two years ago, in Nova Scotia, two bilingual judges retired. They were replaced by two unilingual anglophone judges. There is just one bilingual judge left at the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia. The concern of the community in Nova Scotia is that the government will turn around and appoint unilingual people during the next appointments.

If the government respects both official languages of the country, then how does it explain that the last appointments to replace two bilingual positions were given to unilingual people? The second last appointment to the Supreme Court of Canada was also given to a unilingual person. That is where I take issue with this.

How can the Conservatives boast about supporting both official languages when they do not appoint bilingual judges to the Supreme Court, whether it is a provincial supreme court, which is under federal jurisdiction, or the Supreme Court of Canada?

●(1910)

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand today and affirm this government's commitment to providing access to justice in both official languages.

The Government of Canada is strongly committed to enhancing the vitality of English and French linguistic minorities in Canada and fostering the full recognition and use of both English and French in Canadian society, including our justice system.

The hon. member has raised the particular issue of the filling of vacancies in the Nova Scotia Supreme Court. We recognize that there must be significant linguistic capacity in our courts to provide equal access to justice in both French and English. I can confirm that bilingualism is already one of the enumerated criteria in the assessment of the judicial candidates by the judicial advisory committees. This ability is evaluated along with 14 other criteria, such as intellectual ability and analytical skills.

I am confident that the current appointment process has been crafted in a way that permits the Minister of Justice to address the need for access to justice in both official languages and to ensure that the federal judiciary linguistic profile provides adequate access to justice in both official language minority communities.

Under the current process, before recommending appointments, the minister confers with the chief justice of the relevant court to determine the court's needs, including linguistic capacity.

As hon. members are likely aware, a court's chief justice's primary responsibility is the overall direction of sitting on his or her court and the assignment of the judges. The chief justice strives to ensure that all cases, especially criminal, are heard in a timely manner.

The chief justice is, therefore, well positioned in terms of understanding the needs of the communities served and identifying particular needs where vacancies arise. As a result, the minister consults with the chief justice of the court for which a candidate is being considered to allow them to bring to his or her attention any particular needs to be addressed, including bilingual capacity.

The minister also welcomes the advice of any group or individuals on considerations which should be taken into account when filling current vacancies. It is important to understand that the federal judicial appointments process operates on the basis of detailed personal applications from interested candidates and, as such, relies primarily on a system of self-identification.

With a view to improving the pool of bilingual judicial candidates, the government invites the French-speaking jurist associations and their national federation to identify and courage individuals with the necessary qualifications to apply and to share their recommendations with the Minister of Justice.

Adjournment Proceedings

While bilingualism remains an important criterion considered in the appointment process, it is not and should not be an overriding factor in the selection of our judges. The primary consideration in all judicial appointments is legal excellence and merit. Further criteria includes proficiency in the law, judgment, work habits, writing and communication skills, honesty, integrity, fairness and social awareness.

Our current process allows the government to take into account the bilingual capacity of candidates and to address the need for access to justice in both official languages.

• (1915)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, I cannot understand how the last time, two years ago, the government managed to only find two judges and neither of them were bilingual. In the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia, there is only one bilingual judge.

The client has a right to be heard by a person who speaks his or her language. An anglophone before the courts has the right to be heard by a judge who understands English and can speak the language. The same holds true for a francophone; the law is clear about that. According to Canadian law, there are two official languages and they are equal. It is not simply a service that can be translated.

The parliamentary secretary said that the government is ready to listen to members of the francophone community. Then they should be part of the selection committee in order to put forward names, to

help the government appoint bilingual people to the court. If not, I do not feel that the government will truly be able to represent both languages in Nova Scotia.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Warawa: Mr. Speaker, the government is extremely proud of the quality of appointments made today to our superior courts across the country.

The Government of Canada recognizes the importance of supporting and assisting the development of the official language minority communities. To that end, in June 2008 the government announced the road map to Canada's linguistic duality, which is an unprecedented government-wide commitment with a budget of \$1.1 billion based on the two pillars of participation of all in linguistic duality and support for official language minority communities in the priority sectors of health, justice, immigration, economic development, arts and culture. Unfortunately, the hon. member did not support that budget, but it happened.

As the government has stated in the past, the overriding principle guiding the selection of members of the judiciary, including those of the highest court, is that of merit, and we are proud of that.

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

(The House adjourned at 7:19 p.m.)

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