



House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 133

NUMBER 026

1st SESSION

35th PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Monday, February 21, 1994

Speaker: The Honourable Gilbert Parent

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, February 21, 1994

The House met at 11 a.m.

[*English*]

PRAYERS

The Speaker: Today, as I speak, over a million of our fellow Canadian citizens are watching these proceedings. In that we have been attempting since 1920 to change the format of our prayer a bit, I thought perhaps today we could agree to share in public with our fellow Canadian citizens what we do in private.

With your permission, colleagues, I am going to read the prayers in both English and French. Then I would ask you to observe a moment of quiet meditation, to pray in your own personal way or simply to think of what you will. Is there agreement?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: Almighty God, we give thanks for the great blessings which have been bestowed on Canada and its citizens, including the gifts of freedom, opportunity and peace that we enjoy. We pray for our Sovereign, Queen Elizabeth, and the Governor General. Guide us in our deliberations as members of Parliament, and strengthen us in our awareness of our duties and responsibilities as members. Grant us wisdom, knowledge, and understanding to preserve the blessings of this country for the benefit of all and to make good laws and wise decisions.

[*Translation*]

Dieu tout-puissant, nous te remercions des nombreuses grâces que tu as accordées au Canada et à ses citoyens, dont la liberté, les possibilités d'épanouissement et la paix. Nous te prions pour notre Souveraine, la Reine Élisabeth, et le Gouverneur général. Guide-nous dans nos délibérations à titre de députés et aide-nous à bien prendre conscience de nos devoirs et responsabilités. Accordons-nous la sagesse, les connaissances et la compréhension qui nous permettrons de préserver les faveurs dont jouit notre pays afin que tous puissent en profiter, ainsi que de faire de bonnes lois et prendre de sages décisions.

[*English*]

Amen.

We will now have a moment of silence for private reflection and meditation.

[*Editor's Note: A moment of silence.*]

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY—PETITIONS

Mr. Ian McClelland (Edmonton Southwest) moved

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should consider the advisability of amending the Standing Orders to put in place a procedure whereby, at least once during a session, petitions presented during that session are considered by the elected representatives of Canadians, and may be the subject matter of debate and brought to a vote at the end of the debate, such as for example:

- (a) the subject matter of the petition prohibiting the importation, distribution, sale and manufacture of "serial killer cards",
- (b) the subject matter of the petition requesting changes to the Young Offenders Act to make it more difficult for dangerous young offenders to be released, such as the petition presented in memory of the late Rosalynn Dupuis, and
- (c) a petition which will be presented requesting the government to bring forward a bill which would make recall of members of the House of Commons a part of the law.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is with a great deal of pleasure that I rise on this very historic day. As the viewers have seen and as we in the House have experienced, this is the first change to our prayers in almost 120 years. This would indicate to all of us that while things may change slowly they can and they do indeed change.

(1110)

I am very pleased to speak to the motion. As I speak today and as we consider the motion we should think of the underlying philosophy upon which it is based. It is part of a greater ideal of ensuring Canadians a continuing role or place in the debates of the nation through the use of working toward more direct democracy and the participation of citizens in the national political life of our nation.

The right of citizens to be heard and the right of citizens to be recognized and to receive action are fundamental to any nation or any parliament that wishes to strengthen its democratic conditions.

Supply

Petitions are an effective means of providing Canadians a greater role in setting the national agenda. The use of petitions is one of the oldest forms of allowing citizens a form of redress, dating back to the days of King Edward in the 13th century. It is through the presentation of petitions that the introduction of legislation by bills came about. Petitions are the planted seed from which our parliamentary traditions sprouted. Therefore their significance should not be ignored.

I am not the first person to stand in the House in recent years to speak to the veracity of petitions. I will quote from *Hansard*, June 1, 1983. Stan Schellenberger, the member for Wetaskiwin at the time, presented a private member's bill. In support of that bill he said the following:

The practice of putting petitions to a legislative body is not new. It has been happening for hundreds of years. We have brought from the mother Parliament in Great Britain to this institution the practice of presenting petitions to Parliament. From the beginning, the presentation of petitions was allowed by Parliament as a means for ordinary citizens to bring their grievance to the attention of the House of Commons.

It is a method by which ordinary citizens can bring their grievances, concerns and issues to the House of Commons, to the Parliament of Canada. It is not just a safety valve that we can accept petitions, many with thousands of signatures and many with hundreds of thousands of signatures, reject them and then forget them. It is not just a means of allowing the citizens to let off steam so they do not explode. It is a means whereby the citizens of the country are able to establish a direct link with members of Parliament on an issue by issue, day to day basis.

I have a further quote from Mr. Schellenberger as reported in the same 1983 edition of *Hansard*:

—it is only in recent years that nothing has happened to petitions. Petitions are brought to the House by a Member of Parliament, are read to the Speaker and the Clerk who then deal with those petitions, and the next day they are either found to be in order or not. They then disappear in a room somewhere in the House of Commons.

They are never to be seen again. He continued:

That is not entirely the case, but it is pretty close.

This was 10 years ago when another member of the House was speaking to petitions. This matter has come and gone and come and gone. The reason we are addressing it today is that we hope Parliament, with a new and fresh face, will pay much more attention to the fact that petitions are a meaningful exercise by which citizens participate in the democratic traditions of the country. He continued:

For example, on the issue of capital punishment, many citizens of our nation believe this institution is not representing the wishes of the majority of the nation—

Regardless of whether we believe in capital punishment individually, do our laws represent the will of the nation? He went on:

—and their only means of bringing that to the attention of the House is through the presentation of petitions or Private Members' Bills. Neither of these two methods has been very successful in bringing about a change in the past, but at least the opportunity is there to bring a grievance forward.

I draw the attention of members to the fact that in 1981 Stan Schellenberger brought forward a private member's bill on petitions. We do have a fair amount of the groundwork already done.

(1115)

In petitions we are talking about a much broader issue, of whether democracy is chained to tradition or whether it is anchored securely to the past or whether it is a living, breathing ideal that adapts to the changing times.

Very often whenever the concept of recall or a citizen's initiative or a referendum passes anyone's lips the retort that is heard is always Edmund Burke and his famous letter to the voters of Bristol. It is always said that members are elected to serve their constituents and if they do not like the way the member serves them, they can turf him or her out at the end of the session. In fact after Edmund Burke wrote that famous letter to the voters of Bristol in 1779, in the subsequent general election he was turfed.

His letter was in response to his constituents because they believed that the captured American revolutionary sailors were pirates. They would be brought to England and after about three years or so given a fair trial and hanged. He did not think this was right. Edmund Burke's position was that the American sailors should be treated as prisoners of war, tried by their peers and given a swift and fair trial under British tradition.

His compatriot at the time, Thomas Payne, broke with Edmund Burke on the basic philosophy that Edmund Burke was chained to tradition and to the past and he had made a virtue out of the fact that he was pledging himself in perpetuity in fidelity to the crown, to the Magna Carta, and that because the crown had given rights to the people, and in turn had pledged certain requirements to the crown, that these would follow through forever. Therefore Edmund Burke's understanding of democracy is built purely on tradition.

Thomas Payne was a contemporary of Thomas Jefferson and advised him in drafting the American declarations. His contention was that democracy lives and breathes in changes. In his book *The Rights of Man*, he wrote words to this effect: Every generation has the right and the responsibility to govern for its time and should not chain future generations to decisions of

today than past generations have the right to chain today's generation to their decisions.

It is a very important consideration. He also wrote the phrase that many people will recognize: "The greatest tyranny of all is the presumption of ruling beyond the grave". When we talk about how we should change or should we change the way our Parliament works, the way we as a Parliament relate to the citizens of Canada, and whether empowering citizens is a good thing or a bad thing, it depends whether we have confidence in the choice that our voters made in getting us here in the first place.

We have to understand that we are not in 16th century or 12th century Britain. We live in a completely different world. We can focus the attention of every single person in this country on a single instance. Everybody understands now. Everybody can remember what they were doing at great moments in our history.

The example that always comes up is Ben Johnson. Everyone remembers when he won the hundred yard dash. Everybody in the country knew about it and was aware of it. If this were 16th century Europe it might take 30 years for the information to get around, but we knew it all around the world at the same instant in time.

We have to allow our democratic traditions to evolve and to change so they reflect the way communication works. We have a citizenry that is far more aware of what is going on and far more capable of being a part in providing a valid role in the daily organization and governance of our country. That is why petitions should be given the honour and diligence they deserve. Petitions are a constitutional right of Canadians and are an effective means, in principle, of putting forward concerns, opinions and perceived problems.

(1120)

Although Canadians may use petitions as a means of putting their thoughts forward to Parliament, the use of petitions by citizens is in decline. The reasons should be examined. If the use of petitions is in decline, why do members suppose that is? It has to be because people do not believe it makes any difference. If a group circulates a petition until it gets a million signatures on it, if they work day and night, spend untold hours at it, it comes in here, is read to the House and then disappears, does that not feed the cynicism that all parliamentarians feel the citizens in common hold toward the institution of government?

If we are to build this bridge, this strength and this tie between the people who must go through some pretty difficult times because we are eventually going to have to live within our means, then the leadership to do so has to come from this House. It has to come from the fact that we as members of Parliament honour, respect and pay attention to the citizens of Canada whether we agree with what they say or not.

The voters whom we represent expect us to use our wisdom and our intelligence but they do not expect it to be a one way

Supply

street. They expect it to be a two way street. They do not expect every single issue that comes before the people to be referred to referendum or to petition but they do expect us to listen and to pay attention to whatever they have to say and not just at election time.

Not everything we do or say can be envisioned ahead of time. However, we must give members credit, a lot of it is in the red book. But there are a lot of things that the government did not envision. It had no way of knowing they would have happened, could not have prepared for it so it could not be part of the mandate that gets any of us elected into the House. Therefore we have to be prepared between elections to listen and respond to what our citizens have to say.

The decline or the apathy in the use of petitions by Canadians is a symptom of a much bigger problem. It is the neglect of petitions by elected representatives. It is a microcosm of the alienation electors feel toward the political system.

At times between elections issues arise that were not dealt with during the campaign, as I said a little earlier. It is during these periods that citizens need the ability to put forward their opinions to the government. Democracy needs to be a two way street and petitions allow this exchange to take place with great effect.

Although in principle petitions seem a valuable way for Canadians to address their government and an effective means for government to gauge the mood of the nation, petitions have been pushed aside in recent years, their value left untapped. Therefore we cannot blame Canadians for becoming cynical with government when every time, time after time, they see their protests ignored. The neglect of petitions by legislatures leaves a bitter taste in the mouths of all those who demand a bigger stake in the democratic process. The formulation of a petition is guided by many rules and procedures and it is a painstaking process for organizers.

We have received a petition with well over a million signatures. Imagine the amount of effort that has to go into it and it should not be taken lightly. The fact that the government is able to dismiss a petition regardless of the number of signatures or the importance of the issue with a blanket response is really a slap in the face for both the signators and for democracy.

Governments must recognize what a great tool a petition can be as a means of putting forward effective legislation. By the use of some very simple procedural reform pertaining to petitions, governments will be able to effectively gauge the thoughts of citizens as well as allowing them a way to become involved in national issues.

For instance, issues such as abortion, capital punishment, et cetera have all been addressed by one petition or another. If the government were not so quick to dismiss the thoughts of citizens, it could use these petitions as a springboard from which to develop policy. If Canadians are to go to all the trouble of

Supply

formulating a petition it is most likely a reflection of an attitude present in the nation on a particular issue. For instance, in 1975 a petition on abortion was presented to the House. This petition had over a million signatures. Recently we received a petition concerning the Young Offenders Act, most likely the largest petition ever brought to the House. It does not matter how big it was or how many people got involved in putting it together, it was dismissed with little or no effect, even though it perhaps recognized the attitude of the great majority of Canadians.

(1125)

Petitions therefore could be and should be used as a tool of democracy. Petitions would tie the government closer to national attitudes and bring individual members, all of us, closer to our constituents. More important, it would allow Canadians as individuals back into the decision making process of their nation.

I stand here today confident that these small, simple procedural reforms to the use of petitions could become that very tool. There are many means by which the petition could be made more relevant. We would have to consider which petitions carry a particular weight because obviously not all petitions have the same substance. Petitions that do carry significant weight either because the same issue is presented over and over again or because one petition has an overwhelming number of signatures, must be considered and recognized in deciding what happens to them.

We can make a couple of procedural changes. I would draw the attention of members to the private members' bill that was introduced, Bill C-642 in 1980-81, for more definite attitudes and things that could be changed. One thing we might do is move that petitions, after being read in the House, be given to the pertinent committee for discussion and its merits reported back to Parliament. I recognize that the House procedures committee will be looking at petitions as part of a greater analysis.

Another possibility would be to allow petitions to be debated in the House. The government and each opposition party could then use a supply day to debate the petition. We know that if a petition came to the House we could use a supply day and could debate the petition. That is what we are doing right now where we have the opportunity to bring forward what is on our mind.

Unless we have the vehicle in place to ensure that the government does something about petitions then nothing is going to happen. We have to bring this forward in a fashion that brings all members of Parliament on side, recognizing the need to evolve our Parliament into a situation where it is not just the opposition saying we should pay attention to this. It has to be all

of us, opposition and government together asking how we can make this institution work better?"

I understand at present the government is required to respond to a petition within 45 days. However, nothing states that the response has to be anything more than just a blanket statement with perhaps little relevance to the petition. It is in essence merely an acknowledgement that the petition was received.

At the very least there should be some mechanism in place to keep track of petitions that have been presented in the House in each session, the number of signatures and the topic of the petition. This clearing house would provide an effective way for legislators to keep abreast of the mood of the nation as well as providing a filing system to ensure that records are kept so that we can see if one particular issue comes up day after day after day.

Some people worry that petitions may be a way of allowing special interest groups easy access to the political process. However, I would argue that special interests have already kidnapped the national agenda and that some use of direct democracy is necessary to offset that and bring the majority of Canadians back into the game by allowing the majority of citizens a means of expressing their grievances and the knowledge that they will be addressed. I am encouraged that the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs is considering discussion of direct democracy issues, including petitions.

(1130)

It is imperative that Parliament listens to citizens and that all citizens know Parliament cares about what they have to say.

Mr. Rey D. Pagtakhan (Winnipeg North): Mr. Speaker, I have a brief comment and question for the hon. member. He mentioned toward the end of his speech that special interest groups had kidnapped the national agenda. The word kidnapped of course is pejorative and connotes a very negative meaning.

I would like to ask the member who these special interest groups are that he had in mind, that have kidnapped the national agenda in a negative way.

Mr. McClelland: Mr. Speaker, I take the comments of the hon. member under advisement. I had some difficulty with that word. I thought I should not use it because perhaps it was pejorative and did reflect something I did not wish to bring into this debate.

The fact that special interest groups have had a tremendous impact on the affairs of the nation goes without saying, but not in this Parliament thus far. However, we know in the past 10 years there has been a tremendous amount of special interest group politics in our land. Everyone who has a grievance or an ox to be gored is up front and centre. As members of Parliament

Supply

when we open our mail we open a big stack of special interest group information every single day.

An hon. member: Petitions.

Mr. McClelland: An hon. member said they are petitions. He is right. They are petitions of a kind but they are not the kind of petitions we are talking about.

They are organized people who have the resources to be able to influence the decision making process of this House. It is either because they can hire some Ottawa lobbyist or because they have that ability within their own organization and they know how to turn the wheel, or put a little grease on it.

The vast majority of Canadians do not have access to these organized means of representation. The vast majority of Canadians are individuals who may be sitting around having a cup of coffee saying: "I am really choked about this. I have had it up to here. What can I do about it?" A decision is then made to start a petition.

What happens? They start a petition which might be big or small. Their idea might be fantastic but it is not treated with the dignity it should have when it gets to this House. That is what we are talking about.

I accept the member's position with regard to the use of the word kidnapping. It was a word I probably should not have used.

Mr. Dennis J. Mills (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Industry): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member on the initiative of discussing the whole process of petitions.

The idea of creating more awareness about the process of petitions is useful but I would have to challenge him when he states that these petitions are presented in Parliament and are not seen after that. The fact is that all of these petitions are answered individually and there is further opportunity for those petitions to have greater impact even beyond their presentation in this House.

If members of Parliament are seized with a particular idea they could present it in a private member's bill. The hon. member mentioned the Young Offenders Act. Last Friday the hon. member for York South—Weston on the government side put forward amendments to the Young Offenders Act. Therefore I think the hon. member is short changing the process.

The hon. member also mentioned that not all petitions carried the same weight. If we want to continue on the hon. member's theme of direct democracy I suggest to him that all petitions should carry the same weight. We should not discriminate. If someone is committed about an issue to the point of forming a petition and requesting a member of Parliament to present it, then we should not separate petitions. It is our responsibility to place all of them on the floor of this House and members can react as they choose.

(1135)

I am a little more optimistic about the petition process. I have seen many things occur through this process although I was sceptical during my first year as a member of Parliament. For example one issue I pursued vigorously in the last Parliament concerned violence against women and children. Because a number of petitions were presented other members became interested and, therefore, the issue became a front burner one.

I do not want to leave the impression in the general public's mind that once a petition is placed on the floor of this House that is the end of it. That in fact is not the case.

Mr. McClelland: Mr. Speaker, I too would like to make sure the Canadian public understands that petitions which have come forward thus far have not just been thrown away. Many have had a profound effect on this Parliament.

In general terms if many of us believe as the hon. member initially thought that petitions do not have all that much significance, then the perception already exists in the land that petitions do not really mean much.

Having seen the effect petitions have had either through repeated presentations or in some other way, if hon. members believe that petitions are meaningful but the people in the land think they are a waste of time, then we have a problem. We need to address that because the citizens of Canada have to know their representations carry weight. If we can get that connection and that link together we will go a long way in building a bond between the elected and the electors.

The member's position on whether all petitions would carry the same weight is well made. A petition in the public's interest with 100 signatures is extremely important. We have to be careful though that we do not petition ourselves out of business. At its height in one year 33,000 petitions went to the British Parliament. Obviously that did not work.

Suppose there is a petition on the issue of capital punishment for example that this House is offside with the vast majority of Canadians. Let us say we are going to have a petition the people want and we are working toward a citizens' initiative, some measures would have to be in place to allow citizens access to the parliamentary process. Of course it could not be used frivolously. In something we have put together we have suggested that it might take 3 per cent of Canadians in order to initiate something.

However petitions of another nature that just come to the House do have weight, whether they are from 10, 1,000 or one million people. However, one million people getting together to sign a petition is not the same as 20 people getting together to sign a petition.

Supply

Mr. John Finlay (Oxford): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments and ideas behind the speech, however inherent in what the hon. member has said lies the danger. He has said petitions must not be frivolous. He said that the British House had 33,000 in one year and obviously things got out of hand.

Unfortunately most petitions are generated by special interest groups. I put one example to my hon. friend for his comment. He mentioned a petition of 1,000 signatures concerning abortion which took a great deal of effort. I trust the hon. member knows the latest poll with respect to abortion shows that 70 per cent to 80 per cent of Canadians do not want abortion made illegal. In other words in the vernacular they are pro choice. Therefore if we paid too much attention to a special interest petition of one million signatures we would be getting ourselves into a great deal of trouble.

(1140)

All members in this House represent people in their ridings. If we are doing our jobs we know largely what most of them think. We should be in touch with the silent majority and we should not be swayed too rapidly by special interest groups.

Mr. McClelland: I appreciate the point of view the hon. member has brought to this House. We were elected. We have to use our minds. We have to use our intelligence and we have to use the collective wisdom we brought with us to this House. I am not suggesting for one moment that we operate our country by referendum or by citizens' initiative, however these vehicles should be in place and should be available to citizens.

Today we are talking about how our House accepts and deals with petitions, what we do with them and whether or not citizens think their involvement and work in putting forward a petition really matters.

[Translation]

Hon. Fernand Robichaud (Secretary of State (Parliamentary Affairs)): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to inform hon. members that the principle of the motion before the House today has already been the subject of debate and was referred on February 7 to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs for consideration and a subsequent report by the committee.

The text reads as follows: "That the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs examine procedures regarding members statements, special debates, the taking of divisions of the House by electronic means, the conduct of Private Members' Business, especially with regard to private bills and to Senate public bills, any anomalies or technical inconsistencies in the Standing Orders, the reform of question period, measures to achieve more direct participation by citizens, including citizens' initiative, the right of constituents to recall their MP—

binding referenda, free votes in the House of Commons, debates on petitions and fixed election dates."

Although this exercise is redundant, having already been initiated by a standing committee of this House, I certainly do not question the right of the opposition party to debate the subject today, on an allotted day.

Before starting the actual debate, I think it is important to realize there are two kinds of petitions: first, petitions arising from the fundamental right of citizens to present grievances to Parliament, and second, petitions to seek presentation of a private bill, which are signed by the person or persons seeking to be exempted from the application of certain legislation. Of course, today's debate concerns the first kind which presents grievances expressed by citizens.

For the benefit of Canadians who are listening, I will take a few minutes to give a short history of the petitions presented in the House of Commons and explain how they are presented and how the government is expected to respond. I will then give some examples to illustrate that our Standing Orders give the members of this House the means to discuss matters presented by petitioners. Finally, I will provide a summary of what is being done by this government to bring about a thorough reform of the operations of the House of Commons, which will substantially expand the role of members in developing fiscal policy and in the legislative process as a whole.

(1145)

Petitions as we know them today were developed during the 17th century at a time when the British Parliament was beginning to be perceived more as a political and legislative institution than as the highest court of law in the land. The rights of petitioners and the powers of the House to act on the petitions were defined in two resolutions passed by the House of Commons in 1669. The resolutions were worded as follows:

[English]

"That it is the inherent right of every commoner in England to prepare and present petitions to the House of Commons in case of grievance and the House of Commons to receive the same; that it is an undoubted right and privilege of the Commons to judge and determine, touching the nature and matter of such petitions, how far they are fit and unfit to be received".

[Translation]

Until the adoption in 1842 of several standing orders aimed at defining the format for presenting petitions and at making any kind of immediate debate on their content virtually impossible, the House of Commons imposed very few restrictions on the debates arising from the presentation of petitions. Petitions had become a way to introduce a subject into the House for debate

and they were sometimes used to obstruct the planned work of the Commons.

Moreover, since the composition of the House was becoming at the time increasingly representative of the different trends of thought, the need to use petitions as a means of conveying to Parliament the pressing demands of the public decreased and as a result, the number of petitions presented declined considerably.

The Constitution of Canada recognizes that the right to petition the crown or Parliament to remedy a grievance is a fundamental principle, one that has been invoked frequently since 1867. While the House of Commons is an institution that is representative of the voters, only their elected representatives are allowed to bring issues before the House. Ordinary citizens cannot petition Parliament personally. Therefore, it is important that Canadians have a mechanism for bringing grievances deemed relevant to the attention of Parliament.

Contrary to the situation in Great Britain, the number of petitions addressed to the Canadian Parliament decreased dramatically owing to the establishment of courts of law, to the lack of clarity in the standing orders of the time and to the manner in which petitions were handled. The process in no way reflected the importance that petitions should have been assigned, considering the fundamental right of the people to petition Parliament.

Therefore, in 1984, the Special Committee on Reform of the House of Commons examined the question of petitions and recommended numerous amendments to the standing orders to correct the problems associated with the procedure governing petitions.

Here is what the chairman of the McGrath committee had to say in his report tabled in June 1985:

“Public petitions addressed to the House of Commons constitute one of the most direct means of communication between the people and Parliament. It is by this means that people can voice their concerns to the House on matters of public interest. However, despite the considerable effort spent preparing and circulating petitions to gather signatures, once they have been presented in the House and received, it is rare that further action is taken.

We agree that the right to petition Parliament is a fundamental right of the citizen and that petitions are an integral part of the process whereby the people of Canada speak to their elected representatives. However, the use that is made of this right gives us some concern. The procedure governing petitions should be defined more clearly to generate respect for the process and make it more meaningful. There is a definite need to clarify the rules relating to petitions, to promote increased uniformity in their presentation and to ensure that they are acceptable by the House in terms of content. In addition, we should issue guide-

Supply

lines on the drafting and signing of petitions. We also think that petitioners are entitled to a response”.

(1150)

In order to achieve these objectives, the committee recommended eight amendments to the Standing Orders on petitions.

Here are the rules to follow in presenting a petition in the House of Commons—I am sure that all members already know them, but I am repeating them for the benefit of the people listening to us—as prescribed under Standing Order 36 and summarily described in the third edition of the “*Précis of Procedure*” prepared by the Table Research Branch.

Members wishing to present petitions in the House do so during Routine Proceedings after “Motions” and before “Questions on Order Paper” are called. A petition may also be presented simply by filing it with the Clerk at any time during a sitting.

Before being presented, a petition must be certified and examined as to form and content by the Clerk of Petitions.

If the petition meets the requirements specified in the Standing Orders, the member presenting the petition, after being recognized by the Chair, can make a brief statement to inform the House of the content of the petition; debate on the petition itself is not allowed.

The government is obliged to respond within 45 days to all petitions referred to it. Various conditions apply to the presentation of petitions. Aliens, not resident in Canada, have no right to petition Parliament; nor may ordinary citizens of Canada address the House directly—their petitions must be dated, presented and endorsed by a member. A member cannot be compelled to present a petition and no action may be taken against a member for refusing to do so.

It is interesting to note that Standing Order 36 includes the eight recommendations in the McGrath report except for one element. The committee recommended that the government be obliged to respond within two weeks of receiving a petition, while Standing Order 36 prescribes a 45-day time limit.

The Standing Orders of the House of Commons offer several alternatives for a debate on a grievance expressed in a petition presented in the House. A member can make it the subject of a motion or a bill to be included in the “Order Paper” of the House for debate. The grievance can be the subject of a government motion, like the motion we put forward on cruise missile testing on Canadian territory, which enabled parliamentarians to debate this issue often raised in many petitions presented in this House. Speaker.

The grievance can also be reviewed by a committee of parliamentarians, or take the form of an oral question during question period or of a question in the “Order Paper”. Of course, the government can decide that it needs to legislate to

Supply

redress the grievance submitted to it through the House of Commons.

Then there are the general debates on the business of supply, better known as Opposition days like today, when the Opposition can decide on the motions to be debated on designated days of a given supply period. We are currently in the period ending March 26, which includes nine allotted days. The next period, which will end June 30, will include 10 allotted days. The period ending December 10 will also include six Opposition days.

(1155)

So if they wish, the opposition parties normally have 20 days a year during which the grievances presented by Canadians in petitions tabled in the House could be debated.

On February 7, the House of Commons passed the motion presented by the government House leader, the Hon. Herb Gray, which changes the rules of Parliament. The purpose of this reform is to make the House more effective by giving every member more influence over policy development.

These changes which give members a greater role in drafting legislation and setting the government's spending priorities were the first initiatives arising from the Liberal election program for job creation and economic recovery, as mentioned in *Creating Opportunity*, our famous red book. These initiatives were adopted by the House of Commons.

During the debate, Mr. Gray said, "Today, we are providing a framework for renewal. It will be up to all members, both government and opposition, to make these procedures effective".

The main changes to the Standing Orders are as follows. Two new processes, in addition to those that now exist, are being established so that members can review bills. Thus members will participate directly in the preparation of laws and have greater autonomy in amending government legislation, through the committee system.

The Standing Committee on Finance will hold pre-budget consultations and make recommendations to the Minister of Finance.

The standing committees will be authorized to examine the government's future defence priorities and to report on them at the same time as they deal with the Main Estimates for the current year.

These measures were preceded by a review of the structure of standing committees to reflect the reorganization of the government. These reforms are only the first stage.

A petition is an excellent way for the public to express its opinions directly on the floor of the House of Commons or the Senate, through a parliamentarian. The government is forced to

respond and in many ways will take the petitions into consideration in future decisions.

For instance, and this is a very good example, last week, my colleague, the minister responsible for Canada Post, announced a moratorium on the closure of post offices. There is no doubt in my mind that the many petitions presented in this House by hon. members on this subject definitely had an impact not only on the decision to review this policy but also on the decision to impose the moratorium.

Another case is also a good example: the GST. In the election campaign, we promised to replace the GST and to ask the Standing Committee on Finance to study alternatives. This decision was not made in a vacuum. Obviously, Canadians were heard by our government and their thousands of petitions presented in this House, submitted to the House, bore fruit.

Of course, the members of the opposition party who presented the motion are eager to bring up cases where the opinions expressed by Canadians in petitions were not reflected in decisions made by the government and they neglect to mention all the other cases.

The main subject of debate today is petitions, but I believe that the real issue of this debate and of all the questions raised by members of the Reform Party on the subject of parliamentary reform is the loyalty of members to their constituents, to their party, to their country or to their conscience.

(1200)

We, Liberals, believe that members of Parliament must strike a balance between these positions which can sometimes be reconciled in making a decision, but can also be highly conflicting.

Canada is a country greater than the sum of its parts. So, for the sake of national cohesiveness, the decisions made by Parliament must be greater than the sum of individual decisions made by its members.

We, Liberals, feel that the credibility of parliamentarians is enhanced when they contribute directly, and can make an important contribution, to the development and implementation of programs and goals that the federal government must achieve, and not, as some members would have it, by repeating the public opinion parrot fashion and serving as mere voting machines.

[*English*]

In conclusion, and I know my time is running out, as for the other examples cited in the opposition motion, I wish to bring to the attention of the members the fact that the Minister of Justice has already answered in Question Period to some of these subjects and is looking into those matters.

Supply

As for the third and last example, that of recall, I do not need to repeat what has been said in this House about the experience in Alberta.

[*Translation*]

In closing, I sincerely feel that our Standing Ordes already provide many procedures to deal with grievances presented in the petitions we table in this House. On the other hand, if the Procedure and House Affairs Committee were to conclude that changes were called for with regard to petitions, I am sure that all the hon. members would consider their recommendations very carefully.

[*English*]

Miss Deborah Grey (Beaver River): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his comments.

We are talking about reform and the government is talking about opening up the process. The member referred early in his comments to the fact that petitions will be studied by committees. As far as I was concerned, he almost said that our whole motion today was not out of order but certainly questionable because it seemed that this was already dealt with by going to committee.

Members know that people get a chance to watch this place on television. When they see things disappear from the floor or the Chamber they wonder where they go after that. When something is referred to committee, for instance, or as we received information from our orientation session for all the new MPs this term, it was mentioned by one of our clerks that these petitions kind of disappear into warehouses.

I appreciate the member's comments about the closure of rural post offices. This government has just brought in a moratorium on that. Maybe it is due in some small part to the petitions. I think that is good. Maybe the government is listening to a point on that.

To just say that we really do not need this debate today on the floor of the House and write the whole thing off and say that it is being dealt with in committee is unnecessary. Canadians do not know exactly what goes on in committee. I suspect they will not wait with bated breath until somebody stands up to give a report from the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs about a particular petition.

We are asking on this side of the House that we have this opened up so that people can watch it being debated on the floor of the House of Commons.

I would like to ask the hon. member if he thinks there is virtue and merit in the fact that people can be tuned into their televisions right now watching it. With regard to his comments about the anti-GST petition, which many of his colleagues in the last Parliament presented, I dare say hundreds of thousands of those, what will happen when this government brings in a new, improved GST? How will this government react to whatever

kinds of petitions are brought forward on the floor of the House of Commons on behalf of Canadians?

(1205)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robichaud: Mr. Speaker, I want to reassure the hon. member who just spoke. I have no doubt that her party acted out of a sense of duty in presenting this motion here today. I simply said that we had already dealt with this issue and that a committee would be looking into it, but I think there may be some merit to debating it further in this House.

She referred to the example I had given: the moratorium on post office closures announced by the minister. I was a member of Parliament from 1984 to 1990, and we were already receiving petitions back then. I had received petitions from my constituents because the government had decided to axe some post offices, especially in rural areas.

I think that these petitions did play a major role in calling the government's attention to the fact that, for the people living in rural areas, post offices were really very important.

The hon. member also referred to the GST. When we were in the opposition, we presented many petitions to point out that the GST was creating hardship for the business community due to the complex procedure involved. We have decided to find an alternative to the GST. I sincerely believe that the committee presently examining this issue and looking for ways to replace the GST with a much simpler system and one much more compatible with business management practices will take into account the demands of Canadians, demands brought before this House by members of all parties on behalf of their constituents.

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Jordan (Leeds—Grenville): Mr. Speaker, I do not think anyone is questioning the merit of this idea of exhausting whatever is on the minds of Canadians at every opportunity.

I have trouble with the mechanics of it. I wonder if we would be raising expectations if we would announce that there was a possibility that petitions might be open for further discussion and debate at some point, once each session as the motion reads.

I do not know how we would handle that. I have carried a lot of petitions into the House of Commons. I carried in one last year with between 4,000 and 5,000 names on it. I am always a little disappointed in knowing what happens to them afterward. Somebody signs them and one cannot make out the signature and then what?

I have not let go of that petition. There is a very strong feeling in my riding about this issue. I intend to pursue that. As a matter of fact, it is almost all consuming with me right now. On the fact that it is sort of passed by and filed, the member of Parliament would have to be sensitive whether he thought that had enough merit. A member may have a petition with 25 names on it. We know that if we want to initiate a petition in our ridings, we

Supply

could get one with thousands of names with the opposite viewpoint.

I wonder that when somebody's petition gets here if we might not be getting their expectations up, thinking that they had a real hot issue and it was going to be debated further and then the mechanics of the way we operate just would not allow it.

As the hon. member was saying, there are many more ways a motion can be brought forward based on a petition. One could use it as an opposition day, as is being done today. One could continue having the issue for an opposition day based on a petition one received and thought had a lot of concurrence across Canada.

I am puzzled with the mechanics of how this thing would work. I do not understand it.

(1210)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robichaud: Mr. Speaker, I will deal only with the points raised by my hon. colleague. There are indeed several ways issues raised by Canadians in their petitions can be brought before the members of this House, but to create the expectation perhaps that every petition could be taken up in this House would mean devoting a lot of time to issues which are often of very regional in nature.

However, I believe at the same time that petitions should be tabled and I would certainly be willing to consider proposals from the House committee presently reviewing the whole petition presentation procedure, if it were to suggest a better way to respond to petitions and in fact meet the expectations of the petitioners.

Mr. François Langlois (Bellechasse): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in the debate on the motion tabled by the hon. member for Edmonton Southwest, who represents the Reform Party.

It seems to me that this motion is somewhat premature, considering that the Standing Committee on Elections, Privileges, Procedure and Private Members' Business, which is already looking at one aspect of this issue, has not yet tabled its report but will do so in the weeks to come. Be that as is may, the Reform Party elected to use its allotted day to raise this issue.

This is an important issue since it is directly related to the basic principles of Canadian democracy, parliamentary democracy, as well as representative democracy. In our written constitution, and more specifically the Constitution Act of 1867, the first whereas in the preamble reads as follows: "Whereas the Provinces of Canada, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick have expressed their Desire to be federally united into One Dominion under the crown of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and

Ireland, with a constitution similar in principle to that of the United Kingdom".

Thanks to the constituting authority of 1867, namely the Parliament of Westminster, we have a written constitution as well as institutions, such as the House of Commons, which are, in their very essence, based on the same principle as the United Kingdom's institutions, which is democracy by representation. This means that members are elected for a mandate which, of course, is not fixed but lasts from four to five years, depending on the political situation. During that period, members are not directly accountable to their constituents.

This parliamentary representation was in effect for centuries, until the end of the last century. I should point out that governments and parliaments were so eager to show that their members indeed represented the public that they would not step down immediately after losing a general election. Instead, they would wait until a formal vote in the House of Commons put them in a minority position, at which time they would resign. Things greatly improved in the twentieth century and the process became much speedier, to the point that when governments now realize they no longer have the confidence of voters, they do not wait for a formal vote in the House of Commons to step down. So, there were some adjustments made, although the process was slow, of course.

(1215)

I will come back to the motion put forward by the hon. member for Edmonton Southwest, but let me digress for a moment to mention that the readjustment of the electoral map is being debated in each and every province and is an issue of great concern for our voters. Public hearings on this matter are expected to be held.

As a member whose riding straddles two areas, the region of the National Capital, and by that I mean Quebec City, of course, and Eastern Quebec, let me point out that in Quebec in particular, one region stands to lose an elected representative with this bill. In fact, the riding of Matane will be incorporated into the constituency of Gaspé and my own riding of Bellechasse will see its population grow with the inclusion of nine new municipalities.

For example, in this map readjustment project, for most of the rural ridings, where in the past the number of voters was lowered to compensate for the vast territory—as was the case in my own riding of Bellechasse—this weight coefficient by which larger areas included less voters is not taken into consideration any more. This is an example of an issue which we could have debated, and on which petitions could easily have been presented. All we need to do is ask, and we would get many petitions to be tabled. I imagine that we could have a debate, if a reform like the one the Reform Party is talking about was accepted.

Supply

On the same subject, that is the readjustment of the electoral map pursuant to section 51 of the Constitution Act, 1867, why did we not use the appropriate constitutional provisions or petitions to deal with such important subjects as the representation of the Magdalen Islands, for example, which are a completely distinct entity under the present system? I think that we could have obtained consent pretty quickly for the Magdalen Islands to become a riding under section 51 of the Constitution Act, 1867, that is a riding in which there is a sufficient number of voters without having to include voters from the mainland. And that does not apply only to Quebec; it could be the same for the riding of Labrador.

I wanted to mention this in order to show that we are quite willing to comply with the democratic wishes of our fellow citizens.

As for the wording of the motion of the hon. member for Edmonton Southwest, it is obviously extremely vague since it gives examples such as serial killer cards, the Young Offenders Act, the recall of members of the House and I think I heard the mover of the motion talk about capital punishment in his speech.

I find it a bit unfortunate that members of this House would use a motion to amend the Standing Orders in order to bring back the issue of capital punishment, which was abolished in 1963. It has been more than 30 years since the last execution took place in our country. I find it a bit unfortunate that some people would want to introduce such an issue in this debate today when, as Quebecers and Canadians, we have shown our tolerance and, as a country, we have shown the world that it is not by killing people that we will teach Canadians that it is wrong to kill. This topic has been widely debated, and it would be a pity if, when foul crimes occur, often rousing public condemnation, people were rushed into signing petitions which under our rules would become votable immediately; this would be somewhat like a breathalyser or a heart-rate measuring device that prompts an immediate reaction when a peak is registered.

(1220)

I think the parliamentary system has to handle situations with a deeper and more extensive consideration over a longer term, because in the heat of the moment, it is always easy to have people introduce motions and table petitions which, under terms that have not been specified, would become debatable and votable in this House. I have to introduce a note of caution, here, because I doubt the effectiveness of such a proposition over the long and medium term.

It should be understood also that the proposition being made comes within a certain policy framework. This one is about petitions, but it has to be related to other propositions made by the Reform Party about the recall of members of Parliament, probably about citizens' initiative for bills and of course about

referenda, on which we generally agree since the great referendum in Quebec is expected soon, Mr. Speaker. You know better than anybody else that Quebecers will have the opportunity to vote on their national future.

Since the Charlottetown accord, it is established that, in constitutional matters, major changes will not be decided in a vacuum. No more dealings behind closed doors. No more rolling of the dice. Citizens will be consulted. What happened in 1992 is a clear indication at the federal level, for federal purposes. There should be no federal intrusion in provincial jurisdiction. The federal government should use public consultations on federal matters only. We will never accept consultations on matters that are not part of federal jurisdiction.

Our position has always been, and it has now been accepted that the future of Quebec should be decided by Quebec citizens under laws passed by the Quebec National Assembly and not under some federal law of this House. This is the fundamental right to self-determination. That right was recognized in the San Francisco Charter, which is the basis of the United Nations as we know them.

I would even add, Mr. Speaker, that the motion put before the House today has more in common with an election program than with a simple routine question, in the sense that during the election campaign, which ended on last October 25, the Reform Party suggested many of the reforms that are put before the House and on which Reform members asked questions to the Prime Minister and the government House leader. The answers were quite clear and precise. I believe the government said clearly that it would not allow free votes systematically, but rather on a selective basis.

Second, the government House leader clearly indicated that he really wanted questions raised by free votes to be examined by the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. We must also take that into account. The government has the political will to do things that way.

What the government has decided after the elections, I feel, is that profound changes will not be made during this Parliament.

(1225)

The Reform Party may be putting forward a nice and interesting agenda when it speaks of people initiatives, the recall of Members of the House and other such initiatives, like petitions that can be debated as well as voted on. Unless the Reform Party is preparing for the elections that will precede the 36th Parliament, I do not see how changing or trying to change the Standing Orders will reverse a rather well established position by the government with which we can disagree but which was spelled loud and clear.

Oddly enough and unfortunately, the free vote advocates in the House have given us no example of free votes since the opening of the session. If I am not mistaken, none of my

Supply

colleagues from the Reform Party stood here to express a personal point of view, unless they always have the same personal point of view or those who share the same point of view stand at the same time. This is not my problem but the problem of the caucus of that party that has to live with its decisions. But I look forward to the day when the Reform caucus will not really reveal a split in its approach but rather allow expression of divergent views, when there will truly be an exchange of opinions on the floor of the House. But that is not what we see now. Perhaps they could give us a foretaste of this by debating freely a given bill. Perhaps they will announce it soon, but we have not seen it yet.

Of course, and I am happy to mention this to my distinguished colleague for Kingston and the Islands, the government has not given us either many examples of free votes in this House. We were told there would be free votes but none has been announced yet.

Mr. Milliken: Did you not hear Mr. Gray?

Mr. Langlois: That is not in *Hansard*, but may I quote him as saying that it will come soon? So, in the next few weeks, we will see if what the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands has been saying is true. So, since that will be in *Hansard*, starting February 21—and the hon. member from Kingston and the Islands did not deny that—the government will soon have free votes in the House. Should the Leader of the Government in the House talk to the chairman of the Committee on Procedure and House Affairs? Perhaps we will see that soon.

It will be another way of going about the business of this House, but one where the initiative should come from the government side. We could see this in a lighter way by saying that the Reform Party has yet to put its program into practice; but it is easier for an Opposition party to allow free votes, which would be much less significant. On the other hand, it would be far more significant for the government to allow its members a free vote, a free discussion. When the Prime Minister rises on a bill and states that confidence in the government is not on the line, we will be able to see how this new procedure will work. We will see what transpires.

I assume there will be an adjustment period—perhaps a difficult one. Indeed, one only needs to look at our neighbour to the South to witness the systematic arm twisting that goes on within the same party in the case of certain bills, even though members are supposedly free to vote according to their conscience. Our system, which allows discussions in caucus, may not be that bad. This may be the best place to discuss an issue so that members can agree on a common position and then try and reach a consensus. It may be so. I am asking the question. It is not an answer. However, systematic free voting would impede

the quest for a consensus, so important to our parliamentary democracy.

In any case, Quebec will have to consider this matter once it becomes sovereign. I have no desire whatsoever to reform this House. Though a comprehensive reform is necessary, I prefer to live by the rules we have accepted and with which we comply willingly, namely the rules of British fair play we have come to learn and to respect. I feel that, on that score, the Official Opposition demonstrated complete respect for the British parliamentary system which we inherited along with our very first institutions in 1792.

(1230)

Perhaps this way we feel more comfortable than others members who seeked to be elected with the mandate of changing many things in this House. As far as we are concerned, we want to change many things but elsewhere. We want to change many things in Quebec and as a result, Canada will of course benefit from all those changes we want to make through Canadian and Quebec constitutional reform since there will be an ongoing interaction between both.

This is what I have in mind when I look at the present debate. We have on one side a party which is perpetuating its electoral campaign, a party which is gradually tearing to pieces some pages or some passages of its red book and finally a party which, since it was elected on October 25, says the same thing it was saying before, during and after the electoral campaign.

We have on the other side the Official Opposition party, the Bloc Quebecois, which is dedicated to defend and to promote the interests of Quebec and ultimately, not in the years to come but in the near future, bring about, not a procedural reform or some amendments to Standing Order 36, but a much more exciting project which will consist in creating without animosity and with an open mind our own country, while living in harmony with our most wonderful Canadian neighbours.

[English]

Mr. Dennis J. Mills (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Industry): Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed listening to the member for Bellechasse. I want to pursue the part of his remarks where he talked about the Bloc Quebecois being devoted to the interests of Quebec.

Does the member feel that when he is talking about the interests of Quebec it is appropriate to include all of the things that are being done for Quebecers by this institution? For example, the Government of Canada provides useful services in terms of setting standards in the area of the environment and in the area of small business support. In other words, there are a whole series of things that are being done not just for citizens of Quebec but citizens right across this country.

Supply

Does the member feel it appropriate to only talk about the duplications and the problems with Canada, or does he also feel that it is part of his responsibility to inform his constituents about some of the good things that the federal presence brings to the province of Quebec?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Langlois: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my honorable colleague for his remarks. Perhaps I have not made myself clear or perhaps the member misread what I said. It has to be one way or an other. Maybe we could make a compromise and say there is a shared responsibility.

Throughout my speech, I talked about the legacy of the British Parliamentary system and the chance we have had to live in a democracy. The idea of granting sovereignty to Quebec simply by casting a vote, by counting the ballots and by declaring that the majority shall decide is a legacy from the British democratic tradition. Without such a legacy, we could not hold this debate about the sovereignty and the future of Quebec, and also about the future of Canada because our destinies are closely linked. We just could not hold such a debate.

(1235)

If we have a civilized debate, I think it due to the fact that for 200 years now we have had free and democratic elections—some more free and democratic than others—and we have been able to capitalize on them.

The question asked by the hon. member and my answer complete my speech and lead me to a point raised by the main motion of the hon. member for Edmonton Southwest. I was wondering about petitions, about special interest groups and about paying to organize the signing of petitions. Who would pay?

Court decisions in Saskatchewan confirmed that any citizen, whether a natural or artificial person, could invest any amount deemed appropriate during an election or referendum campaign, and this could apply to petitions. At the present time we have no clear benchmarks set by law or recognized by the courts. Some day we might have a Supreme Court decision since the Solicitor General expressed the desire to refer to the Supreme Court the decision of the Appeal Court of Saskatchewan.

Personally, considering this lack of benchmarks, I would prefer to keep the status quo and its well known guidelines, rather than follow a risky road.

[*English*]

Mr. Randy White (Fraser Valley West): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the comments made by the hon. member. I have heard many comments and statements since coming here as a new member, statements such as “we Cana-

dians and Quebecers”, the separation between Canadians and Quebecers. I am most disturbed about the final comments in the hon. member’s speech. I do not know if he wrote them down or was just expressing them. However, they were something to the effect that the Bloc be able to achieve two countries, independence, without animosity. I am greatly disturbed by that.

Certainly there will be animosity. That kind of statement is not taken very lightly by a person like me, one who has lived in most provinces in Canada and travelled throughout Canada extensively. As well, I have lived in Quebec.

I would like to ask the member how he feels the Bloc as the Official Opposition represents either eastern Canada or western Canada when in fact it has an agenda, I would suggest, totally alien to either one of those geographical areas in this country.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Langlois: Naturally, Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Quebecois is devoted to the defence of Quebec interests, but voters gave us the role of Official Opposition and we have, therefore, the mandate to speak for all Canadians irrespective of their province of residence. We have already demonstrated that fact in this House by giving our consent to the passage in one day of the bill to end the strike of longshoremen at the port of Vancouver.

We have been actively involved in the business of the House, we gave our consent, we asked questions on bills and other matters of interest to Canadians from the maritimes, the prairies or the west. Of course, our basic mandate comes from Quebec, the hon. member is right about that, but nobody can accuse us of refusing to defend the interests of Canadians when action was necessary to protect justice and fairness.

Mr. Dan McTeague (Ontario): Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a few comments for my friend and colleague, the member for Bellechasse, concerning the value of our responsibility to represent our riding. Before October 25, it was recognized that the Bloc Quebecois could not act as the Official Opposition.

(1240)

I would like to put a simple question to the member: Does he not agree that it is important for him to represent all Canadians, including franco-Ontarians, franco-Quebecers, franco-Newfoundlanders and franco-Manitobans?

I think it is very important that the Bloc Quebecois deal with subjects that concern Canada as a whole.

Mr. Langlois: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Ontario for his question. The fate of French speaking minorities has been a concern of mine ever since I was in grade school and we were asked to give a silver coin for the survival of French. In those days, that silver coin was a nickel or a dime we could have used to buy a chocolate bar or a pop, but we brought it to school because we knew it was for a good cause. Everybody pitched in.

Supply

Today it is gratifying to see the member express himself in perfect French.

Think of all the money they collected in Quebec, and not only money; think also of all the Quebec clergy who went to other provinces as missionaries in dioceses where sometimes their work was far from easy. Let us pay homage to those men and women who worked outside Quebec.

In conclusion, I would like to remind the House that a few days ago, the Bloc Québécois, elected only by Quebecers, gave proof of a great openness and understanding of the problems in Eastern Canada and particularly those of the Atlantic when it voted in favour of the constitutional resolution allowing for the construction of a bridge between Prince Edward Island and the mainland whereas our Reform colleagues voted against that project. . . .let us ask ourselves: who in the opposition best defends the interests of all Canadians from the Atlantic to the Pacific, the Bloc Québécois or the Reform Party?

I think if we asked the people of Atlantic Canada today we would get a very clear and precise answer to that question.

Mr. Speaker, allow me to mention also the extremely positive comments we received from the press and from distinguished personalities from western Canada when we took position on the issue of the lockout in Vancouver harbour.

[*English*]

Mr. Ted White (North Vancouver): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the whip of the Reform Party, I would like to advise the House that, pursuant to Standing Order 43(2), our speakers on this motion will be dividing their time.

This motion brought forward for discussion by the Reform Party is another indication of our party's commitment to find ways the people of Canada can have a greater input into the decision making process of government.

We want to encourage ongoing discussions of important issues in every community right across Canada. We feel that this does not always have to involve the government. It does not have to be sponsored or funded by the government.

People like to discuss important issues with their friends and their neighbours. They like to write letters to the editors of the local newspapers and they like to call local talk shows on both television and radio.

Some start petitions as a way of highlighting the concerns of the community. These things happen spontaneously without any cost to the government and they certainly do not require government input or interference. Government attempts to

influence the outcome of community discussions on issues can easily backfire.

Huge sums were spent by the previous government funding the yes side of the 1992 referendum but the people of Canada made up their own minds on the issue and the majority voted against the government position.

The politicians at the time refused to apologize for their attempts to manipulate the result of the referendum and the will of the people. To this day many are unable to accept the result and continue to criticize the referendum process.

(1245)

The Reform Party takes the opposite position entirely. We strongly supported the right of voters to express their will through the 1992 referendum and we absolutely accepted the result. We continue to actively push for a regular set of referendum questions to be placed on a separate referendum ballot at the time of each federal election. The cost would be minimal, whilst the benefits to the people of Canada would be enormous. By allowing them to take an active part in important decision making we would be showing the people of Canada that we the politicians are prepared to listen to their concerns.

We believe this type of referendum plays an essential part in the new democracy which is finding its way into our parliamentary system. Petitions are a form of mini referendum. Initiated by citizens they are sometimes very localized in nature with just a few thousand signatures. Sometimes they are of national importance, carrying as many as a million or more signatures.

Unfortunately governments, because they are often absorbed in their own agenda, tend to ignore petitions or these mini referendums. Ministers are photographed accepting this petition or that petition, taking the opportunity to be in the news instead of taking the opportunity to follow the will of the people.

Many petitions specifically seek to change a government direction or policy. There is a public perception, perhaps accurate, that instead of seeing this as a way of building voter confidence and a way of correcting flaws in policy, a government will shuffle the petition off into a black hole somewhere and will continue on with what it calls its mandate.

Governments are failing to recognize the key to re-election in the information age is to be responsive to the will of the people. Future political stability rather than depending on party unity is going to depend on being responsive to voter concerns. Failure to introduce at least some basic forms of participatory democracy will condemn us to many years of political upheaval and uncertainty.

One government member has stated that petitions are acknowledged and do not disappear. That is not the perception of members of the public. Most adults have probably signed a

petition at one time or another—I know I have—and have probably been as disappointed as I have that no matter how many signatures are on a petition there is no real way to turn the petition into legislation which addresses the concerns of the petitioners.

Regular open consideration and debate of major petitions presented to the House would go a long way toward showing citizens that their concerns are being discussed in Parliament, that their signatures on a petition really does count, that a major petition will be discussed here, and that the government may take notice and act to change or introduce legislation to deal with the concerns.

If something is worth doing it is worth doing it well. More credibility would be added to the process if a free vote could take place at the end of the debate. Instead of being partisan we would have an opportunity as MPs to work together, to actively support or reject the direction suggested by a petition.

There is no threat to the government in agreeing to amend the standing orders in the way our motion suggests. There simply are not any downsides to this suggestion. What harm can possibly be done by the occasional debating of petitions?

I urge all members to join me in supporting this motion. I hope many of them will speak in its favour. I am very disappointed government speakers so far seem to be taking a negative position simply because this is a Reform motion. The opportunity to debate petitions before the House would show constituents across Canada that we really care about their concerns.

I would like to relate the discussion today to the red book. Government speakers regularly imply that because people voted for a Liberal government every one who voted Liberal supports every single policy position in the red book.

(1250)

Either government members are naive—and I do not believe that to be true of the majority—or else they are taking an unreasonable position that can be seen through by every clearly thinking Canadian. Obviously not every person who voted Liberal agrees with every policy in the red book. They probably voted Liberal after feeling that on balance they were making the best choice, even though some of the policies may have been unacceptable to them.

Even government members will have to admit there are probably a few policies in the red book the majority of Canadians would like to see changed. That is not because the original research was faulty but because times change and opinions change. What is wrong with adapting to changing times? What is wrong with recognizing that a particular policy has outlived its

Supply

usefulness and is no longer appropriate? What better way for voters to indicate this than by starting a major petition?

If the government acted upon a major petition following an open debate in the House, its popularity would be enhanced and it would be more likely to win again in the next election. This is my free advice to the Liberal Party.

This seems like such a simple principle to me that I do not understand why governments continue to regularly defy voters. Why do they force through their mandate and then wonder why they are defeated at the next election? If all of us here value the opinions of our families, our neighbours and our friends, by extension we must value the opinions of all Canadians.

We must work together to give them a greater say in the House by allowing the debate of petitions on their behalf. Treating petitions more seriously is one way to gain the confidence of the Canadian voter, especially on major petitions such as the one requesting changes to the Young Offenders Act.

The process of debating petitions would be new and would no doubt need to be modified in the light of experience after the first few sessions. There would have to be a fair way of selecting petitions for debate as we could clearly not handle every one that was presented to the House.

If selection were made on the size of the petition there would be an automatic built in judgment as to the importance of the subject to be handled in the House. Clearly a petition with a million or more signatures will have been well organized and will probably deal with a matter of national importance, while petitions with a few thousand signatures are probably in response to an issue of a localized nature and would be better dealt with by municipal or provincial governments. Once those governments see that we are debating major issues developed from major petitions in the House, they will have much greater confidence in us as their representatives.

Once again I urge all members of the House to show their constituents that they are listening to the opinions of constituents and are conducting themselves accordingly. I urge them to support the motion.

Mr. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the comments of our colleague across the way. Many of the things he is trying to achieve are certainly not impossible and are not contrary to some things I believe in.

However, we are dealing with a motion today that asks the government to amend the standing orders. At last count those were the standing orders of the House, not of the government. Apart from all other things that are wrong with the motion, Mr. Speaker, you would be offended if the government unilaterally tried to change the standing orders.

Supply

All of us in Parliament in the last session were objecting because the government of that time decided to change the standing orders pursuant to a recommendation of the parliamentary committee but chose only to amend some of the things the parliamentary committee had asked for, thereby creating an imbalance in the House which was felt to be objectionable to the opposition; in other words, it could not pick and choose from the report. I do not know of anything before the committee that recommends a change of the standing orders. At least nothing has been proposed by the hon. member's party to do that which is asked in the motion today.

(1255)

The Deputy Speaker: I think the question is clear enough. Would the member wish to reply.

Mr. White (North Vancouver): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his comments, but I cannot help feeling that they were directed well away from the topic of the debate and certainly the spirit of the debate.

I reiterate that the motion before the House today was placed there by the Reform Party because we want to help voters of Canada have a greater say in the running of their government. For them to see that occasionally major petitions actually get discussed in the House in front of the television cameras so that the whole of Canada can see it would be going a long way toward opening up that process for Canadians.

Miss Grey: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. It seems to me that if the motion were found in order by the Table certainly we should not be disputing whether or not it is a legitimate motion. It is as simple as that.

The Deputy Speaker: That is certainly debate.

[Translation]

Is the hon. member for Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup rising to make a comment? Very briefly please, there are only two minutes left for both of you.

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup): Mr. Speaker, I would like to say to the hon. member for Vancouver North that I would probably have preferred to see the Reform Party introduce a motion proposing ways to modernize the members' representation role rather than strengthening direct democracy. Indeed, I think the implementation of means such as electronic vote by telecommunications or teleconferences should be considered more urgent than presenting to the House petitions immediately after an election during which most of the issues at stake, at least for the coming year, were dealt with by the population.

I would like to ask the hon. member to clarify a point: could he explain what criteria would make a petition more acceptable than another because we would obviously have to answer

questions such as how many signatures are required, or must a petition be signed by voters in each and every province? Could issues such as constitutional amendments be raised on a regular basis? Otherwise we will be discussing everyday matters.

[English]

Mr. White (North Vancouver): Mr. Speaker, I would take the hon. member's suggestions under advisement and perhaps suggest that his party use its opposition days to introduce topics of its choice.

On the matter of how we would choose petitions, that was a subject of my speech. I mentioned that perhaps selecting petitions with the largest number of signatures would automatically place them in the realm of being a petition of national importance. That would certainly be one suggestion.

Mr. Randy White (Fraser Valley West): Mr. Speaker, there is not a lot of difference between Fraser Valley West and Fraser Valley East; they are both in the Fraser Valley.

It is a little difficult not to duplicate some of the comments made here by virtue of the subject in itself. It is not as large a subject as the finances of the country and so on. Nevertheless it is an important issue. It is quite fundamental to many issues on which the Reform Party is looking for change.

I am happy to speak to the issue of petitions. It is a petition that expresses one of the oldest forms of grass roots populace input of citizens to express their aspirations and their grievances. Ordinary citizens are provided the opportunity to bring these issues directly to the House of Commons. Petitions can also become a vehicle for members to strengthen their own representations or those of their party on important issues.

I also recognize this particular issue has been referred to the procedure and House affairs committee. I am a member of that committee and it is on the agenda. Nevertheless it is important to express our positions at this time.

Compared with bills, motions and oral and written questions, petitions appear to rank low in importance. Their greatest apparent drawback is that after they are presented the House takes no prompt visible further action, much like the situation we have in the House when members give a speech. Often it is not recognized that something happens immediately after the speech and it takes some prompting to get things done.

(1300)

We have over 200 new members in the 35th Parliament. It is my belief that the House will see more basic reforms to its operation than any of the previous 34 Parliaments. The existence of the new prayer this morning is one example of that. I am reminded of a saying: "If we continue to think the things we thought we will continue to get the things we've got". Basically it says that if we do not start looking at new issues and pressing

Supply

for reforms then we will continue to get those things we have had over the last 125 years.

With this in mind, the process of petitions is another reform that is required as much, as was mentioned here today, as free votes, elections every four years, an elected Senate, recall, referenda and improved question periods. These are things that need to be changed and they all deserve a day when we can discuss them.

To understand the need for change I wish to provide a history of petitions in Parliament and then an opinion of what is wrong with the current system. Finally I will provide some recommendations for change.

We have heard a little bit of that history already this morning but it bears repeating in some cases. The right to petition the crown for redress of grievances dates back to the reign of King Edward I, as my hon. friend from Edmonton Southwest mentioned this morning. That was in the 13th century. It was from petitions that legislation by bill was gradually derived.

The practice of putting petitions before the Canadian House of Commons was adopted from the mother Parliament in Great Britain. In Great Britain petitions were debated in the House until 1842 when the practice was discontinued because the debates left no time for other business. That in itself leads us to understand that since it was so busy with debates on petitions it meant that people actually wanted to have some say. At the time of the discontinuance approximately 33,000 petitions each year were being submitted for debate. Would it not be nice to have that kind of interest in this country?

After 1842 in Great Britain, petitions were read and then could be referred to a committee of petitions, although debate was not generally permitted on them. If petitions related to personal grievances they could be designated as urgent and be debated immediately.

Again in Great Britain, the committee of petitions published a report of petitions and had similar powers that standing committees have in this House today. On the other hand, the committee of petitions in Great Britain had no power to investigate or report on the merits of a petition or to call witnesses for investigation.

In 1974 Great Britain discontinued the practice in favour of its current practice which is that the petition goes to a minister of the crown who must make a recommendation or an observation to the House which is tabled and printed.

In the early days of Confederation, public petitions played an important role in the proceedings of the House. Petitions were frequently referred to special committees. Orders for return were made for copies of particularly topical petitions and debates and divisions sometimes took place on whether petitions should be received.

Over the years, the number of petitions has dropped significantly. People began to turn to the courts and other administrative bodies for redress of grievances. Lobbying took place at other levels. MPs became more sensitive to public opinion and began to use other procedures such as oral and written questions to articulate the needs of their constituents. It was and continues to be today the fact that the House does not promptly and visibly act on a petition that causes the most frustration. From my perspective there is more formality and bureaucratic red tape put on the front end of a petition process.

We really have to look at the process after the petition is received. That is where we get into the meat of it. Standing Order 36 is completely dedicated to format with the exception of subsection (8), which indicates:

(1305)

The Ministry shall, within forty-five days, respond to every petition referred to it.

If you look at the response given it appears to be merely lip service. Is it any wonder why petitions are seen to be an exercise in futility when the government's own standing orders do not acknowledge their importance?

In 1994 just when our citizens most need their voices to be heard on issues like our failing criminal justice system, the poor quality of fiscal management of government and change is desperately needed to the reform of our parliamentary system, the members of our Canadian Parliament cannot make a speech to a petition, they can merely make a brief statement. They cannot present a motion referring to a petition so that action can be taken. They cannot be assured that the petition will go any further than the Clerk of the House. They cannot provide constituents the confidence their concern will be dealt with and they cannot refer the petition to a committee of the House of Commons.

I would propose the following changes to the petition process. The first change is that every petition should be presented to an all party parliamentary committee which selects a specified number of petitions each month for debate.

My second recommendation is that each debated petition shall be presented as a motion to be decided on by the House.

Third, all petitions should be responded to by the minister showing that the government is not paying lip service to the issue.

Fourth, the petition committee should have the same authority as any other parliamentary committee, which is another topic in itself because they too need to change.

Finally, it is necessary to say that citizens do not lightly petition government. We are all aware of how difficult it is to have citizens take a more continued interest in their own affairs and in their own Parliament.

Supply

I sincerely hope this has not just been another speech in the House of Commons that will be ignored. A note from my research indicates that many such speeches regarding the petition process have taken place over the years and next to nothing has been done to the process.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvan Bernier (Gaspé): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Fraser Valley–West for his remarks. I have listened carefully to the different speakers, and more specifically the one who just talked about the subject in front of us this morning.

The first point I would like to stress—and I am going to pay them a compliment, even though they belong to a different party—has to do with the fact that the aim of their motion is to increase democracy and get Canadians interested in what is going on, in other words, in their own fate. For that, hats off to them.

But, where I have some reservations, as some of my colleagues may have, is with the vehicle they want to use. Today, we are talking about making greater use of petitions in the House. I am not opposed to the idea, in principle, but as any theoretician would, I want to know how it is going to work.

For example, on our side, different petitions carry more or less weight. What I mean is that not everybody has the same understanding of how to use petitions. Some clever people, good at manipulating public opinion, might see how to make use of them for their own purposes and apply financial leverage to that end. Therefore, in a spirit of fairness for all, it might be important to define clearly the new framework for petitions and set limits for financial contributions.

(1310)

[*English*]

Mr. White (Fraser Valley West): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure what the question was but I know the statement I picked up refers to the importance of a petition and the weight given to it. After campaigning and talking to as many people as all of us have in the House, it is surely recognized that people do not feel they have enough effect on the role of government. For instance, look at the petitions that poured into this place on the GST and it went through.

There has to be a way to allow people to express themselves and the vehicle of a petition is noteworthy. It is the proper way. The problem is when the petition gets into the House of Commons and what happens to it. What kind of effect can the average individual Canadian have on the political agenda of this House of Commons?

My response to the hon. member's comments is that we believe in petitions. We think petitions should come to the

House of Commons but we think subsequent to it receiving them there has to be some teeth in it so that we are made to listen to the people.

The Deputy Speaker: Will the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans be mindful of the fact that there is a minute left for him and the response.

Mr. Harbance Singh Dhaliwal (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to the comments of the hon. member for Fraser Valley West. I have a couple of questions which have been asked before but they have not been answered in a clear, concise fashion. I would like to say that getting greater democracy in the House is always important for everyone but in a democracy one must always be pragmatic.

We want a workable government. We want a government which is practical and can work efficiently. We should always keep that in mind. I believe the example given earlier where 33,000 petitions were received makes it unworkable to continue debating petitions.

My first question concerns special interest groups. Does the hon. member feel special interest groups have an advantage in that they may have resources, financial and otherwise, to take advantage of a situation in determining the agenda of Parliament?

My other question is in terms of priority—

The Deputy Speaker: The member will have to deal with just the first question because the time is up. Please be very brief.

Mr. White (Fraser Valley West): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member touched on my favourite topic, the funding of special interest groups. The fact is that in special interest groups everybody has an interest. For those that have an extraordinary amount of funding it is normally found that the money comes from this very place.

Time and time again we see where both Liberal and Conservative governments have funded special interest lobby groups and quite frankly we are opposed to that. To answer the question it is exactly that. The difference comes from eliminating the broad funding levels and trying to get all special interest groups to act with some relative amount of equality and then all petitions could be considered equal.

The Deputy Speaker: The time is up. We go back to debate.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Milliken (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to take part in a debate on such an important issue. As chairman of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, this matter is of great interest to me, since it has already been referred to my committee.

Supply

I know that the previous speaker, the hon. member for Fraser Valley West, will want to share his ideas with the committee, as well as the hon. member for Bellechasse who spoke earlier.

[*English*]

I welcome their participation in the debate and look forward to it continuing in the committee. I think it is important the record show that in fact the rules of the House relating to petitions are not wholly out of date and are not so unrepresentative as are suggested by the hon. member for Fraser Valley West and indeed by his colleague, the hon. member for Edmonton Southwest, who led off the debate for his party this morning.

(1315)

In my view today's debate on petitions is really part of a larger debate on the whole parliamentary system that has been launched by members of the Reform Party. Their agenda includes more than debate on petitions. It includes proposals for recall of members of Parliament, referenda among the Canadian public, consultation on various legislative proposals, vague proposals for direct democracy that I am sure we are going to hear more about, and other suggestions they have put forward for changing the way this place operates in relation to the general public, particularly in respect of free votes.

I suggest part of the reason the Reform Party has put this forward is its lack of policy alternatives on other issues. We have witnessed in the last week or so Reform members dwelling on this issue in question period to the exclusion of virtually any other question in the national interest. They are pursuing this particular agenda for the reform of Parliament as their sole policy option at this stage. I find that slightly regrettable, interesting though the proposals are and worthy as they are for debate.

I am happy to be able to participate in that vigorous public discussion on each of these issues which is important. However, it may mean a vigorous defence of a system which has served Canada extremely well for 125 years and more and which has served the United Kingdom for hundreds and hundreds of years and has worked. The system is flexible and allows for change. That may happen but I do not think it is necessary to change all the rules of the game in order to make it work that way.

Part of the reason for this concerted attack on our parliamentary institutions—and I call it that because I think it is an effort to diminish Parliament in some ways in a broad characterization—is very well founded. I know it is why many of the Reform Party members and indeed virtually all members were elected to this House.

It was because of the strong revulsion to the policies and proceedings and manner of dealing that characterized the Conservative government which occupied this side of the House for

the last nine years. I do not need to go into all the reasons for that revulsion but the people of Canada clearly spoke. The sad witnesses to that fact are the two remaining Tories who sit as independents in the back row on the opposite side. Canadians were sick and tired of the frankly deceitful practices exhibited by the previous government almost daily in its dealings with Parliament and with the people of this country by putting forward policies that said one thing but did another.

Canadians saw through that and instead of accepting it as a fact of a bad government, they took it as a bad Parliament. They blamed the failure on the institution and on the way government worked, rather than on the particular people who occupied the government benches and got it so mucked up.

If members of the Reform Party had been here in any number in the last Parliament they would have heard me speak frequently on the evils of the previous government and pointing out its deficiencies. I was not alone. There were 80 of us in this party who did the same thing. Some members who were obviously less effective were in the New Democratic Party and some of them have had to leave. However, the fact is we were faced with the situation of very poor government. Canadians felt deceived by that government and therefore thought that Parliament was at fault somehow in not dealing with this deception.

The majority was there. The majority held throughout the Parliament and we were unable to secure the defeat of the government. Had we done so, respect for this institution would have gone up immeasurably in the eyes of the public but we could not. Therefore it took an election to clear the House and get rid of the supporters of that government. We now have them replaced with a good number of Liberals on this side and a number of Reform members—I will not mention the Bloc in this particular context.

However, a group of Reform members decided to join in and monopolize the public chant that something was wrong with Parliament when in fact the problem was with the government. There is a difference. The difference was exhibited by the hon. member for Fraser Valley West in his speech when he said that government's rules do not allow for certain things to happen. The rules he was referring to are the rules of Parliament, not the government's rules. These are the rules of the House of Commons.

(1320)

There is a difference and I cannot stress that too greatly. This House is not the government. It may have a large number of government members in it. Members of the government sit in it. They participate in it. They debate in it and they may control it from one day to another. They certainly have to have its confidence throughout the time they are in office. However, it is a parliamentary House, not a government House.

Supply

It is here for us to debate government policy. Members on the other side particularly are given ample opportunity to make criticism of government policy. When members on this side feel critical they are also given certain opportunities to make remarks along that line.

The purpose of the Chamber is not to decide government policy. It is to debate the wisdom of it and to call the government to account. Those are its primary functions. As members of Parliament we are given various places where we can exercise those rights and responsibilities. I believe if the new government shows the responsiveness Canadians demand of it Canadians will lose their interest in major sweeping reforms in the way our system works.

The system worked well for at least 100 years. Only in the last few years has it come into disrepute. Part of that has been the enormous swings in public opinion which have resulted in huge majorities on the parts of government such as we saw in 1984 and I can think back to one similarly disastrous election in 1958. These massive swings in public opinion are becoming more pronounced. They were most evidenced in the 1993 election when three parties were elected, two on a very regional basis and one on a national basis with a very large number of seats in every case. It indicates again the electorate's volatility and unwillingness to stand by traditional party disciplines or to stay with a party in the belief that a party will do the best thing for their part of Canada.

That volatility has meant that members of Parliament have to react differently. However, it does not mean they have to abandon the principles and their own feelings about how public policy should be shaped and developed. The purpose of political parties is to aggregate interests so that members trade off their various interests for the good of the whole. What we see in the opposition parties quite frankly is a breakdown in that normal relationship where the party has become the single policy vehicle and members are expected to adhere firmly to that policy vehicle.

That is particularly so with the Reform Party. I have pointed that out before on various occasions. I am not being critical of the party in this sense. I am simply stating the obvious that to be a member of that party one has to believe in the whole policy platform of the party such as it is and if one does not, then that person is not in. Naturally, there is a fair bit of unanimity in that party which is lacking in this party and may be lacking in the Bloc on issues other than Quebec sovereignty or separation, whatever it wants to call it.

I know I have to speak to the motion and I turn to that. I want to deal first with the role of a member of Parliament in a broad sense. It is important to look at some of the remarks made by

famous people on other occasions dealing with the role of a member of Parliament.

This morning the hon. member for Edmonton Southwest referred to Edmund Burke but he did not quote him. I would like to do so because what Edmund Burke had to say on this subject is of importance. Of course members will recall that he was a member of the British House of Commons. In his famous speech at Bristol in 1774 he said several items that are significant. Unfortunately I cannot find the words leading up to this quote so I cannot quote him precisely.

He spoke for the need for a member of Parliament once elected to speak for the national good and not to be the mere delegate or representative of his or her community dealing with narrow community interests. He said it was important that a member represent a community, but in addition the member should have some eye and some ear for the national good and seek to represent that in his or her dealings. He said in the closing remarks: "You choose a member indeed, but when you have chosen him he is not member of Bristol, but he is a member of Parliament".

I cannot stress those words too strongly. With respect we were not sent here to represent just Kingston and the Islands in my case or just Edmonton Southwest in the case of the member who spoke earlier, or the riding of Elgin—Norfolk only. We are required to look at the country as a whole, support Canada as a whole and look to the national good. Edmund Burke said that. I agree with that and we all have that obligation.

(1325)

Of course these words may be a little out of date today, but in the same speech he said:

Certainly, Gentlemen, it ought to be the happiness and glory of a representative to live in the strictest union, the closest correspondence, and the most unreserved communication with his constituents. Their wishes ought to have great weight with him; their opinions high respect; their business unremitting attention. It is his duty to sacrifice his repose, his pleasure, his satisfactions, to theirs,—and above all, ever, and in all cases, to prefer their interest to his own.

But his unbiased opinion, his mature judgment, his enlightened conscience, he ought not to sacrifice to you, to any man, or to any set of men living. These he does not derive from your pleasure,—no, nor from the law and the Constitution. They are a trust from Providence, for the abuse of which he is deeply answerable. Your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgment; and he betrays, instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion.

The same distinguished gentleman said in the same speech at Bristol to the electors:

I did not obey your instructions. No. I conformed to the instructions of truth and Nature, and maintained your interest, against your opinions, with a constancy that became me. A representative worthy of you ought to be a person of stability. I am to look, indeed, to your opinions,—but to such opinions as you and I must have five years hence. I was not to look to the flash of the day. I knew that you chose me, in my place, along with others, to be a pillar of the state, and not a weathercock on the top of the edifice, exalted for my levity and versatility, and of no use but to indicate the shiftings of every fashionable gale.

Supply

Those words, said over 200 years ago, still reflect in some measure the duties and obligations of a member of Parliament. I would venture to suggest they are not obligations that are taken lightly by any member of this House. While they may be a little strong and we may be more cognizant of public opinion today than Edmund Burke was in 1774, partly because we can measure it more easily, the fact is members of Parliament do have their views. They do make their own opinions and they are required to do so.

We as members are often forced to make decisions on issues that were not current or discussed and debated during an election campaign. Issues come up subsequent to a campaign yet we have to make decisions on those and are obliged to do so. I do not want to shirk my responsibility in that regard.

I think back to the last Parliament when there were votes on a declaration of war. No one suspected in the 1988 campaign that we would be faced with such a decision in that Parliament but we were. We faced it and we voted on it. It was a tough decision. Members found it very difficult and very disconcerting to be put in that position. Yet it was a situation that had to be faced and it was faced.

The same thing will happen on other issues throughout the four or five years we serve in this House. I do not suggest as members of the Reform Party do that every time we get cold feet on something we should run off and have a referendum or do a poll and decide how we should vote based on the results. We were elected to exercise our mature judgment. That is what we are here for and that is what we will do.

There is one other interesting quote. It is more amusing than not, but I find it particularly relevant to petitions. In many cases petitions are signed by organized groups across the country. They decide to get signatures on a series of petitions and present them to Parliament to show members of Parliament that their point of view is particularly important or correct or one that is shared by a tremendous number of people.

Mr. Nault: Interest groups.

Mr. Milliken: Interest groups certainly arrange these petitions, as the hon. member for Kenora—Rainy River suggests.

Let me read what Mr. Burke had to say in another writing. I believe this one is a discourse on the French revolution. It is an interesting quote:

Because half a dozen grasshoppers under a fern make the field ring with their importunate chink, whilst thousands of great cattle, reposed beneath the shadow of the British oak, chew the cud and are silent, pray do not imagine that those who make the noise are the only inhabitants of the field; that of course, they are many in number; or that, after all, they are other than the little, shrivelled, meagre, hopping, through loud and troublesome insects of the hour.

(1330)

I would not want to suggest that quotation would apply to all interest groups, not at all. The fact is it does happen that some interest groups reflect that kind of difficulty not just for governments but for oppositions as well. They come to members of Parliament and demand that members present petitions on their behalf. The member may not agree with the petition and yet feels duty bound to make the presentation and does so.

I can assure hon. members on all sides that occasionally a member will be asked to present a petition with which the member does not agree and the member will be placed in some difficulty. There are two ways. One can do it through the back door, filing it with the clerk, or one can stand up and make a presentation in the House and have it handed in in the way we normally do.

That option is there under Standing Order 36. Members can choose. They can do it whichever way they want.

What happened with petitions in the past? In the last session of the last Parliament, 5,282 petitions were presented. In the session before that, the second session of the last Parliament, 14,581 petitions were examined. Of those, 8,631 were presented in the House.

We had a tremendous number of petitions presented over the five years during which that Parliament sat, over almost 14,000 petitions presented in Parliament during the two sessions. I do not think any were presented in the first session. If so, there were very few.

The bulk of those petitions presented dealt with the goods and services tax. Are we going to have a debate on every one of these petitions every time the GST comes up? There is ample opportunity for debate of petitions. There is room for improvement, and as the chair of this committee I will be listening very closely as to how this can be improved.

Look at the opportunities. First of all, many of the petitions deal with government business and the GST was debated in this House, although for a very limited time because the government was closure hungry and used closure at every turn. There was an opportunity for debate.

On other subjects members can move motions under Private Members' Business and those motions can not only deal with the substance of petitions, but the motions can move that the subject matter be referred to a committee for detailed study. Those motions are debatable in this House in private members' hour, admittedly for a limited time but they are debatable and a reference could be made to a committee by virtue of that motion.

Supply

There are opportunities for asking questions about petitions. There are opportunities after a question has been asked for a debate on the late show that can concern the subject matter of petitions.

Government business generally deals with matters that are subjects of petitions and debates will be held. Many of the petitions being presented today deal with recall. I think the members from the Reform Party have been presenting those items.

We had a debate on that subject the other day. We referred the matter to the committee I have the honour to chair for detailed study and we will be looking at it further.

These subjects are debated in Parliament. They may not be debated the same day the petition is presented but usually if the matter is important there are thousands of petitions on the same subject presented over an extended period of time and I hope it is not being suggested that we have a debate every time one of these is presented.

In addition, the government is required to respond to petitions. The hon. member for Fraser Valley West said these were ignored by the government. That is not true. It is required to respond within 45 days and I have no doubt that within a few days I will be tabling government responses to petitions in the House.

The member says the minister does not respond. These responses are signed by the minister and are made available in the House to members who have filed a petition. If others want copies, they are available. These are not something that are ignored. These petitions are presented and dealt with.

I am sorry my time has run out. It is hard to believe that it has gone so quickly and I am sorry I cannot continue.

Mr. Elwin Hermanson (Kindersley—Lloydminster): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague's comments with great interest and would like to make a few comments and also ask a question.

First of all, he commented that my party, the Reform Party, seems to have only one agenda which is illustrated by our questions in question period. Specifically, we deal quite often with matters of more direct democracy.

(1335)

We think that Canadians' priorities are economic issues and we have been trying to ask those types of questions but have not been able to get answers from the government. It keeps saying it cannot answer those questions until the budget is delivered. In the meantime we have been asking questions about another issue. Canadians spoke to us about regarding their lack of involvement and input on the decisions that are made in this House.

I was glad to hear the hon. member say that he feels there could be some improvements and would be willing to have the procedure and House affairs committee look at changes to the way we handle petitions. I think that is the gist of this motion, and the motion only calls for at least once during a session that petitions be considered by this House as a whole.

My major concern is that this House has lost its concern and respect for Canadians as individuals. The member quoted Sir Edmund Burke and while he was quoting I almost thought I was listening to a Tory politician from days gone by. It was that type of attitude that saw them practically eliminated from this House, saying if we do not like what they are doing, judge them on their record, come back in a few years and kick them out. That is what Canadians did.

As it turned out, they gave the Tories two mandates because they had this lagging memory of what Liberal governments had done previous to that and they were not prepared to make a change until that memory because so faint that the Conservative memory was more direct in their minds and they said we have to change this government. They were not yet knowledgeable enough about Reform. We will do some things to correct that situation so that the Reform Party could form the government.

The problem is that politicians appear to be far too elitist.

The hon. member also mentioned interest groups. Interest groups play a vital role in what happens in Canada, the issues of the day. Would he rather see interest groups use government funding to lobby, to use paid advertising, oftentimes with that advertising paid for by taxpayers through their grants by government?

Would the hon. member rather see those interest groups have to go out to the public, to individual Canadians, who are really important, and see if they could get their support by putting their name on a petition that would be brought to this House with the potential that it might actually be debated?

Mr. Milliken: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member for Kindersley—Lloydminster in his comments is being perhaps a little unfair in judging the previous Liberal government. Those of us who ran in the 1988 election had fond memories of the very excellent previous Liberal government and we feel that Canadians were duped into voting for the Conservative Party in 1988 because they seemed to believe that free trade would bring unbounded prosperity to Canada. We now know that has not been the case. That was discovered by Canadians, unfortunately, in the period between 1988 and 1993 and the situation has therefore been corrected.

In 1988, in my view, there was no recollection of any disastrous previous Liberal government.

The hon. member for Kindersley—Lloydminster, as I say, has I think altered history a little in his question. Perhaps when he

reads my remarks again tomorrow his memory will be refreshed, although I can see it is not sinking in at the moment.

With respect to the question he asked, he knows that what he is trying to do is get me to denounce government funding to interest groups and say that somehow this government funding is inherently bad where interest groups use the money to lobby government. Obviously, some interest groups become a bit of a thorn under the saddle, as it were, for governments, particularly so where the government is already funding the group and paying for it to be such a thorn under the saddle. I am sure he would agree with me that cutting such funding would be very worthwhile.

On the other hand, it is very important that interest groups sometimes be paid, moneyed, in order to represent the interests of the groups that they are seeking to espouse or advance because sometimes the groups are unable to fund themselves and pay for necessary representation. For one reason or another, they are under-represented in our system.

I can think of examples of that, examples that I will not give to the House today because it might exclude some others. I think there are reasons for government to be involved in the funding of interest groups, even where the interest group is using the money to lobby government. Governments sometimes need this kind of lobbying, in part to convince others of the benefits to be derived from government activity or interest in that particular area.

(1340)

There is an educational role for governments to perform that governments are aided in by interest groups. While the activity may be directed at the government, the effect is to educate the general public on the importance of the subject and sometimes that happens.

Mr. Jack Ramsay (Crowfoot): Mr. Speaker, the hon member has made a very eloquent attack upon the reforms of government that the Reform Party has put forward through this motion. I find that what he had to say is quite different from when he spoke to the Reform Party caucus at the time he was presenting himself as we approached the election of the Speaker. I see the difference between what he indicated to us at that time with regard to the reform of this place and some of the reforms that we are advocating.

Some of the things he said in his speech were very interesting to me. He quoted Mr. Burke as stating it was the duty of the member to take into consideration all facets and represent the national good. During the referendum of 1992 we saw all members of this place follow the party line set by their leadership. We saw that of most of them, the vast majority of them. They were not listening to the people.

Supply

Therefore, the national good, if it was a national good that was decided in that referendum, was not decided by the elected members of this country. It was decided by the people through a free vote offered by the referendum of that time.

The member has indicated that the system has served us well for 125 years and that all is going smoothly. He has failed to mention the national energy program that was foisted upon the west and decimated the oil industry, the energy industry in that part of the country, and our focus upon the need to reform the Senate, the upper House of Parliament, that could have stopped that unfair legislation at the time, unless he supports the national energy program.

I ask him a general question of whether he sees no merit at all in the attempts that the people of Canada have made through the election of not only reformers but many new members in this House to bring about a more democratic change within this place.

Mr. Milliken: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Crowfoot seems to be under a slight misapprehension. I want to say very clearly that I support discussion of some of these proposals and I am not adverse to all of the proposals being put forward by the Reform Party.

However, a fundamental change in our system, such as would happen if recall were adopted for example, I am not a supporter of. I will hear the arguments on it but I have very grave doubts that it will enhance our system. In my view it will damage it.

I quoted Mr. Burke because I think it casts an obligation. The words he used indicate the obligation that is cast on members of Parliament to vote in accordance with their best judgment and it did not mean, and I am sure the member knows this, voting as a block, voting with your party on all occasions. Your best judgment is what is required. That is what Mr. Burke said. He did not say one voted with one's party on all occasions and I did not read any such quote. That is a significant difference. One of the planks that Reform is pushing here is free votes and I did not say I disagreed with that.

The government House leader in his speech on the throne speech debate a few weeks ago indicated that there would be freer votes in this Chamber. I urge the hon. member to read the government House leader's very clear speech that elucidated extensively the government's view on free votes. It was a masterpiece of clarity.

The hon. member indicated that he thought that in the referendum campaign somehow I was ignoring the wishes of my electors. I can only say to the hon. member for Crowfoot that the electors of Kingston and the Islands voted yes, agreeing with me fully in my stand in respect of the national referendum. The yes side won by a narrow margin in Kingston and the Islands and I was very pleased that it agreed with me in my views on the referendum. I suspected it would when I took my position on that whole issue. I supported that cause in the House and as we

Supply

went to the people in the referendum campaign. For him to suggest that somehow members on this side ignored the wishes of their electors is false. I fully represented the wishes of my electors then as now.

(1345)

Finally I note the member went on about the national energy policy. I was not here when that was devised. I can only say I think it has been blamed for everything that has gone wrong in western Canada since it was implemented, and I do not think that is accurate.

Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island): Mr. Speaker, when citizens take the initiative of creating, organizing and collecting a petition I have observed that they are always highly motivated to do so. A trivial matter does not normally elicit that kind of response. A matter which the people hold dear, something that is very important to them, will result in their coming together, organizing a petition, getting it circulated, collecting names and doing so because they believe it is very important.

It takes a great deal of effort and personal sacrifice on the part of organizers of petitions. The people who sign petitions usually do so with total sincerity and with a genuine support of the cause being promoted. I believe it is very seldom a person will sign a petition without asking very seriously the question: "What am I signing?" I also believe once a petition is started it has another very desirable effect: it generates a lot of discussion so the issue being brought forward is debated by a great number of people in the community. The level of information or the understanding of the topic is enhanced because of the debate.

Therefore the question should arise of what politicians or decision makers do with these petitions. I believe it is the perception of a great number of Canadians that the process by which a petition is handled is that an MP is given a small amount of time in the House to make a supporting speech when the petition is presented. It is recorded in *Hansard* and other documents as having been presented. Then it appears that the petition is trucked off to a warehouse somewhere. It is very seldom we have any action on the petition. In any case it is extremely seldom that we have any precipitous action or fast action.

I think of one example. In the last little while many petitions have been presented in the House on killer cards. There appear to be a great number of Canadians like me who are more and more concerned about the growing element of violence in society. They say that this is an area where we need to put our finger in the dike, that we need to stop this.

The petitions are pouring in here, but what is done with them? At this stage apparently nothing. I emphasize the word apparently. It is undoubtedly true it has been recognized that the government will respond. However the fact is there must be an

increased level of communication with Canadians so they have assurance that when they speak they are heard.

We in Parliament are embarking on a new era. This a new Parliament. Things are now being done differently. We have approximately 200 new members in the House who, like me, are eager to make an impact on the way our country is governed.

I cannot resist quoting from the now famous red book. Some of the ideas in the red book were found earlier in the Reform Party's blue book. That ought not to be surprising since the red book came out during the election period, at a time when politicians seeking re-election had a great interest in finding out what people were thinking. They probably conducted polls, listened to the people at the doors and heard what they were saying, and as a result those things were included in the red book.

(1350)

We were doing the same thing over a number of years. The process by which our blue book was derived was really quite similar in the sense that we were listening to the people. We heard a great number of people say over and over: "We do not have a true democracy; we have an elected dictatorship". That is a bad word, yet that is the word I kept hearing. They were saying: "We elect these people and once they are elected they have a free hand and they do whatever they want; they do not listen to us on an ongoing basis".

As a result the blue book reflected what the Canadian people were thinking. It came up with these wonderful and much needed concepts about the way our government works: things like petitions, citizens' initiative of which the petition is a form, referendums and recall so that not only at election time but also between elections the people of the country have a say in how they are governed.

I quote one very important sentence from the red book that accurately expresses the feeling of the Canadian people: "The people are irritated with governments that do not consult them".

We must stop to think about the implications. We have had elections anywhere from six months to five years. That is how our elections are occurring and when the people are being heard. If that is satisfactory why are the people irritated with governments that do not consult them? Clearly it is because they are not being consulted between elections. That is the crux of the matter when we think of an efficient way of dealing with petitions, citizens' initiatives, the subjects of recall and of referendums.

If the people are irritated when we do not consult them, how much more irritated they must be when they voluntarily, by petition, bring an issue to us in the House and we leave the perception that we are not paying attention. How much more irritated they are when we ignore the hard work that went into

Supply

the collection of a petition with thousands or tens of thousands of names. We must start listening and acting on what they say.

There is a very important fundamental question. A member opposite made reference not very long ago to the fact that we in the Reform Party keep coming up with these reforms to the parliamentary system. I contend that is really fundamental to everything else. Unless we have a true representative democracy, we will probably never be able to solve the other problems that come to us from time to time. In particular I am thinking of the question of the national debt and the disaster being brought on us by its ever increasing size.

The people are clearly saying that government spending must be brought under control, yet in the context of how the House operates there seems to be no real mechanism to say we will have a balanced budget. There is not a final authority in the House to determine that. The budget is announced to us and we have no real input into it other than to debate it and hope to influence the outcome.

In a true democracy who then holds the final or ultimate authority? We seem quite ready to accede that it is the people. I find it interesting, being a new member of Parliament and from talking to many who have been here before and a great number who are here for the first time, that no one in the House would question the wisdom of the voters in choosing the person they sent here.

(1355)

The Reform Party and all of us who are members of that party are thinking the people in the west chose very wisely. I am sure members opposite are convinced the voters expressed great wisdom in sending them here. If we can trust the voters to make a decision on whom to send here, on which party to vote for and on which leader to support, should we not also be able to trust them with other issues? This touches on the subject of referendums as well as on the subject before the House today.

There is a large demand out there among the people for a more representative government, for representation in a more democratic style. The people are beginning to insist that they be heard. Their willingness to be governed by legislatures will be withdrawn if we act like dictators.

Furthermore, if we listen more to our people and the message they give through referenda and through petitions, I am convinced we will have wiser decisions. There are many examples where the people in the broad context make better decisions for the country than do those who sit in little islands of isolation.

I look forward to questions or debate of other members.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Eugène Bellemare (Carleton—Gloucester): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Elk Island talked about the motion making petitions the subject matter of debate, which I find totally ridiculous, especially the part where it says that petitions will be brought to a vote at the end of the debate.

If Reform members had sat here for the last five years, as I have done, they would realize all the problems this would create. Reform members keep saying that this government and this Parliament spend too much. Does he not recall that the last referendum cost more than a quarter of a billion dollars and does he not realize that holding referendums on almost everything, year in and year out, will cost billions of dollars?

[*English*]

The Reform Party is suggesting that for every petition there be a major debate and major vote. That kind of law or rule could be absolutely divisive. We have heard the Reform Party contest the official languages, for example. It is trying to divide the country further? That is the intent of the Reform Party.

If any of you have ever sat on municipal council, you would probably remember that homeowners on a single street—

The Speaker: I know the hon. member would want to address the Chair in his question.

Mr. Bellemare: Mr. Speaker, they would experience, sitting on a city council or municipal council, that often when petitioning a street people are divided on the same topic. They could get 100 people signing the petition, signing yes. Yet on the same street people would be signing on the no side.

How do we verify the correctness of the signature or the age of the people? Who does all of that? What kinds of expenses would we get involved in trying to make sure that every signature was bona fide, that every person signing was of age, that every person signing was not half drunk, or that we are not getting a bunch of loonies or bigots constantly signing petitions who do not believe in the proper process?

We have seen in the case of the member from Markham that people are banding together like lynch mobs in a village trying to hang someone without due process.

(1400)

Maybe lynching was good in the thirties or sixties of the 19th century in Alabama. In Canada this is not what we want. We are not made up of bigots.

Mr. Epp: Mr. Speaker, I would simply comment that if the member for Carleton—Gloucester insists on demeaning his

S. O. 31

electors and saying they are bigots when they present their petitions or when they vote on a referendum, that is his choice.

I would choose rather to listen to my constituents, to take very seriously what they say in terms of a referendum or a petition which they present. There may be some difficulties administratively but they can certainly be overcome in our modern technological age and there is great gain to be made by listening more and more to the people who sent us here.

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: It being two o'clock, pursuant to Standing Order 30(5), the House will now proceed to statements by members pursuant to Standing Order 31.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

ACADIA CENTRE FOR SMALL BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Mr. John Murphy (Annapolis Valley—Hants): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to extend my congratulations and support for the Acadia Centre for Small Business and Entrepreneurship.

Today this centre kicks off a week-long conference at Acadia University for people considering a career in self-employment.

The conference, entitled "Exploring Your Future: Learning About Entrepreneurship", will allow participants to determine if self-employment is right for them and if so how they go about starting a business.

Following this conference, 35 participants will be selected for a 14-week employment training program.

Not only does such a conference play an important role in promoting the local community network but it also provides valuable services and information for those wishing to get their new ventures off the ground.

I fully support the efforts of the Acadia Centre for Small Business and Entrepreneurship and ask that the members of this House join me in congratulating the organizers of this important conference.

* * *

[*Translation*]

SNOW SURFING WORLD CUP

Mr. Michel Guimond (Beauport—Montmorency—Orléans): Mr. Speaker, for the second year in a row, the Parc du Mont-Sainte-Anne in the magnificent riding of Beauport—

Montmorency—Orléans will play host to the Snow Surfing World Cup from March 9 to March 13, 1994.

The 1993 world cup drew more than 10,000 spectators to the site and the event received extensive media coverage.

Millions of television viewers in Europe, Asia and America watched the competition and in the process, they became better acquainted with Quebec, and in particular with Côte-de-Beaupré and the Parc du Mont-Sainte-Anne.

[*English*]

The second Snow Surfing World Cup at the Parc du Mont-Sainte-Anne should once again focus world-wide attention on Quebec as a region, highlighting its distinctive character and the extent of its sports and tourism facilities.

From March 9 to March 13, 1994 the whole world will be watching the Parc du Mont-Sainte-Anne.

* * *

THE BUDGET

Mr. Jim Hart (Okanagan—Similkameen—Merritt): Mr. Speaker, my constituents have overwhelmingly opposed any reduction in the RRSP contribution limits. Reducing these limits is increasing taxes for those ordinary Canadians such as small business owners and employees who use RRSPs as their sole means of preparing for retirement.

I have also received literally hundreds of letters of support for the home buyers plan which is due to expire at the end of this month. This plan utilizes the RRSP program to make home ownership a viable option for many Canadians and has been that rare bird, a successful government program that does not cost the treasury a cent.

I hope that the finance minister has considered these voices of ordinary Canadians as he prepares his upcoming budget.

On behalf of my constituents in Okanagan—Similkameen—Merritt, I ask the finance minister to stop speaking in code. Broadening the tax base means raising taxes.

* * *

[*Translation*]

NATIONAL HERITAGE DAY

Mrs. Eleni Bakopanos (Saint-Denis): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to address my colleagues in the House on the occasion of National Heritage Day.

The diversity of our country and of its people is expressed in many ways and makes us unique within the community of nations.

Our wealth of cultures, languages and traditions enrich the everyday lives of all Canadians.

(1405)

National Heritage Day is an opportunity for all Canadians to reflect upon the meaning and richness of their heritage.

[English]

On this Heritage Day Canadians should take this opportunity to remember with pride the contributions of those who have helped to form this great land, appreciate and share the diversity in which our heritage is expressed, strengthen and celebrate the multicultural fabric of Canada.

We in this House have much to celebrate since we are very much an example of that multicultural fabric.

* * *

GIRL GUIDES OF CANADA

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre): Mr. Speaker, last Friday evening the Girl Guides of Canada in the city of Scarborough awarded the Canada Cord to five young women from Scarborough Centre.

The Girl Guides' Canada Cord recognizes an individual's dedication and contribution to the Guiding movement, their community and our country.

The five young women are Jennifer Barnes, Analese Campbell, Jandy Morrow, Kristi Tumbling and Jennifer Wright. They have committed their time and efforts over the past three years to earning this award. As valued members of our community, they can be regarded as fine examples of what every young Canadian can aspire to be and I congratulate them.

* * *

KATE PACE

Mr. Bob Wood (Nipissing): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of all Canadians and in particular on behalf of the people of Nipissing I would like to congratulate Kate Pace of North Bay, Ontario for her outstanding performance in the women's Olympic downhill race this past Saturday.

As the reigning world champion, Kate once again finished among the best downhillers in the world and is looking forward to competing in the remaining World Cup races to defend her world championship title.

A capacity crowd of over 1,000 people jammed the North Bay Art Centre at four o'clock in the morning in order to watch Kate compete in her race. This show of support for Kate Pace by the people of North Bay and area is due to Kate's commitment to her sport and to her community and to her country, Canada.

S. O. 31

I am very proud to congratulate Kate today after a terrific performance at the Olympic Games and I wish her all the best as she defends her World Cup downhill title later this year.

* * *

[Translation]

FONDS DE SOLIDARITÉ DES TRAVAILLEURS

Mr. Yves Rocheleau (Trois-Rivières): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pride that I inform the House that owing to an investment from the Fonds de solidarité des travailleurs du Québec, the Trois-Rivières plant of Canadian Pacific Forest Products Limited will reopen on February 23 under the name of TRIPAP after having been closed for two years and will start producing paper again, thus giving jobs back to 300 workers.

Over the past few years, the Fonds de solidarité has made it possible to create or maintain more than 700 jobs, in particular at FABRON of Trois-Rivières, Cadorette Marine of Grand-Mère, in the Prime Minister's riding, and Nova Quitech of Pierreville, a total investment in excess of \$41 million.

On the 10th anniversary of its setting up the extremely useful role the Fonds de solidarité des travailleurs du Québec has played in the Mauricie—Bois-Francs region had to be brought to the attention of this House.

* * *

[English]

NATIONAL DEBT

Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island): Mr. Speaker, I am very excited about an initiative being taken by several women in my Elk Island riding. Maralyn Benay and her colleagues are undertaking the formation of an organization which will receive voluntary donations by citizens to be applied directly to the national debt. They are receiving a great deal of positive publicity and the momentum for the plan is growing by leaps and bounds.

While warning her about the magnitude of Canada's debt and over-spending problem, I compared the efforts with spooning water into a rain barrel while ignoring the fact that the bottom is out of the barrel.

We have citizens who are ready to tackle our huge debt problem with the same fervour as we accepted the emergency situation of our country during World War II. How wonderful it would be if we here in Ottawa could do our part by stemming the flow out of the bottom of the barrel.

Mrs. Benay and her group deserve all the encouragement they can get and all the people who are ready to donate, whether a small amount or a large, are to be commended as Canadian heroes.

S. O. 31

[Translation]

BILINGUALISM

Mr. David Berger (Saint-Henri—Westmount): Mr. Speaker, last Friday, it was very amusing to hear the statements made by two members of the Bloc Québécois.

The member for Richmond—Wolfe condemned those who oppose official bilingualism. I am very happy to hear that the Bloc supports official bilingualism.

For his part, the member for Louis-Hébert congratulated Isabelle Brasseur on winning a bronze medal. But he did not even mention the name of her partner, Lloyd Eisler, who comes from Ontario. Does he think that Ms. Brasseur would have won in pairs skating by herself?

This reminds me of the Canada Cup tournament held a few years ago when we won with Wayne Gretzky and Mario Lemieux. Many people said that we could not have won without both of them, for is it not true that unity is strength?

These statements by two members of the Bloc Québécois show the contradictions and weaknesses in that party's positions.

* * *

(1410)

[English]

HERITAGE DAY

Mr. Gurbax Singh Malhi (Bramalea—Gore—Malton): Mr. Speaker, today is Heritage Day.

It comes as no surprise that Canada would choose to celebrate diversity among its peoples. This is a country where cultural differences are considered a strength rather than a weakness. It is just one of the reasons Canada has acquired a sterling international reputation for fairness to all people.

While some Canadians may take their freedom for granted, those who worked hard to emigrate here will never do so. Canada is secure enough in its own virtues that it allows and encourages new Canadians to retain their own culture.

We should remember that most countries force immigrants to purge themselves of their heritage. Canada, however, sees the value of heritage and celebrates it from coast to coast.

Happy Heritage Day, one and all.

HERITAGE DAY

Mr. Rey D. Pagtakhan (Winnipeg North): Mr. Speaker, Heritage Day holds great significance for our country. Today we reflect on the many faces of Canada and celebrate diversity and unity.

I am reminded of my own immigration and of how my wife and I have been blessed with four sons born and raised in this great nation. I am privileged to live in Canada, honoured to serve the constituents of Winnipeg North and proud to be part of the beautiful diversity that is the Canadian mosaic.

Heritage Day is also about our national institutions, our railways, schools, parks and system of government. It is about the building of our nation which touched generations of Canadians' lives in numerous ways, politically, economically and socially.

It is also about governments playing a major role in preserving our cultural landscape, fostering closer relationships with our First Nations peoples and sustaining official bilingualism in a multicultural framework.

The sum of all defines our national values—democracy, freedom, social justice and peace.

* * *

[Translation]

IMMIGRATION

Mr. Jean-Paul Marchand (Québec-Est): Mr. Speaker, I want to denounce an inhuman situation experienced by a Romanian family from my constituency, Mr. and Mrs. Maraloï and their two sons, who have been in Canada for three years. As soon as they arrived here, they started the procedures with the department of immigration to straighten out their situation in Canada. These people made a lot of effort to integrate themselves to the Quebec community. They never asked for any form of government assistance. The academic successes of the children illustrate how well integrated they are. This is a model family.

Yet, the applications made by that family have been rejected because authorities feel that there is no proven risk of persecution if they return to Romania. So, after three years in Canada, they are told they must go back. This is inhuman. Are we going to celebrate the International Year of the Family by uprooting these people from the community in which they have settled and are appreciated, and by deporting them to a country where they no longer have anything and where they have every reason to believe they will be in danger?

*Oral Questions**[English]***FORESTRY**

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay East): Mr. Speaker, last week I had the privilege of taking part in a series of meetings in Vancouver with the Canadian European Parliamentary Association. We had an extensive field trip in the air and on the ground at Clayoquot Sound.

As the House may know, the Europeans had brought forward a resolution to the European Parliament which would have seen a boycott of up to \$2 billion worth of Canadians softwood lumber products. They had based their tentative decision to boycott on the basis of information and representations made by certain B.C. protectionist forces and they are to be applauded for taking the time to view first hand the practices which are so soundly denounced by those certain protectionist groups.

I am pleased to report that after thorough discussion and observation we have arrived at a reasonable approach to the resolution of their concerns. The environmentalists should consider the progress that has been made in sustainable forestry management practices. I suggest they consider compromise instead of confrontation and co-operation instead of controversy.

* * *

ELECTORAL REFORM

Mr. Nick Discepola (Vaudreuil): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to express my total disagreement with the proposed electoral redistribution and ask that steps be initiated to halt the process immediately.

Last Friday over 30 municipal leaders of my riding, as well as the West Island of Montreal, were consulted. They agreed unanimously that the proposal does not reflect the reality of our region. In these difficult economic times, when tomorrow once again in this very House Canadians are going to be asked to make difficult sacrifices, can we really afford the millions of dollars that this reform will cost, let alone ask ourselves what it will accomplish?

(1415)

I have consulted with many of my colleagues from Ontario, Quebec, the west and the Atlantic provinces, and we all agree it is our duty to be frugal with the taxpayers' hard-earned money. We can save millions of dollars by simply passing a bill to delay electoral reform until the next census.

I do not believe Canadians are under represented by the current 295 MPs. Allow me to conclude by reminding the House that it is quality, not quantity that should be the focus here.

*[Translation]***CANADA SCHOLARSHIP**

Mr. Patrick Gagnon (Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine): Mr. Speaker, allow me to express in this House my most sincere congratulations to eight young students in Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine who received scholarships from the Canadian government to maintain their academic excellence in post-secondary science, engineering and mathematics.

These fields of learning are important to the economic future of the region and of Canada and I count greatly on the professional contribution of these scholarship students from Gaspé and the Magdalen Islands for our economic future. I offer my sincere congratulations to Frédéric Aspirot, Nadia Bouchard, Julie Cummings, Anik Henry, Pascal Poirier, Steve Renaud, Stéphane Thériault and Serge Vigneau.

With this Canada Scholarship worth up to \$10,000 at the university level and \$7,500 at the college level, these young people will be able to excel in their studies.

These scholarship recipients will help maintain Canada's scientific excellence and I am very proud of that.

The Speaker: Dear colleagues, for several weeks, some of you have been asking me about Standing Order 31.

[English]

You have addressed the Chair and asked if I could give some kind of indication as to the length of Standing Order 31s. I am happy to report to you that after five weeks, if the statements are about 150 to 160 words, everyone seems to be able to get them in. So I report to you that this seems to be going well.

I would like to thank again those of you who have prepared statements and sent them to the interpreters. It does help in the translation and I do thank you on behalf of all colleagues.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD*[Translation]***BOSNIA**

Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition): My question is directed to the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Yesterday, NATO and UN leaders decided against authorizing air strikes at Sarajevo. It seems that UN peacekeepers are taking control of Serb positions and that at last peace will come to Sarajevo.

Oral Questions

I want to ask the minister whether he could report to the House on the situation today in Sarajevo and give us assurances that the withdrawal of Serb heavy artillery was sufficient to justify cancelling the air strikes.

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Foreign Affairs): Mr. Speaker the withdrawal of heavy artillery or its transfer to UN control has improved the situation very substantially, and the process is definitely producing the results expected by UN and NATO members.

The demilitarization of Sarajevo will continue, and that is why we felt it was important to maintain the threat of air strikes for the use in cases where either the Serbs or the Muslims would be inclined to bring back and use this heavy artillery.

However, we think the diplomatic initiatives produced results and the peace process has definitely been started and we hope that no air strikes will be necessary under the circumstances.

(1420)

Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I must agree that this is good news and that the government was right to join its partners in order to produce the results we see today.

However, the war goes on in other parts of Bosnia. I would like to ask the minister whether he could tell us what strategies are being considered by Canada and its partners to end the fighting in Bosnia and thus prevent the Serbs from taking the heavy artillery withdrawn from Sarajevo and using it to fight elsewhere in Bosnia?

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Foreign Affairs): Mr. Speaker, we feel that diplomatic initiatives by the Americans and the Russians helped to create a climate that is far more promising than has been the case so far. We feel that these diplomatic initiatives must continue and should be pursued in order to get the three parties involved in this conflict—Serbs, Croats and Muslims—to agree to a peace process that would extend to all of former Yugoslavia. Meetings will be held in Europe tomorrow and at some time during the next few days in order to put in place, at the highest levels, a mechanism that will bring a durable peace to the region.

[English]

Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, given the fact that the ultimatum for the lifting of the siege in Sarajevo has expired, can the minister indicate what the new timetable will be for the withdrawal of Canadian troops from Srebrenica? Can we now expect a rapid withdrawal under conditions that guarantee the safety of the troops?

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Foreign Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to report that the decision made in regard to

the changing of the guard in Srebrenica is implemented. It is in the process of being totally implemented.

Unfortunately because of the weather conditions and the numerous points of control that the Dutch troops have to go through in order to arrive there, they are not there yet. However they are en route and I am optimistic that this will take place in the coming weeks.

* * *

*[Translation]***NATIVE AFFAIRS**

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval): Mr. Speaker, last Friday, the grand chief of the band council of Akwesasne, Mr. Mike Mitchell, handed in his resignation saying, and I quote: "I have put plans forward to initiate collaboration between Mohawks and the government, but the infighting has worn me out".

Would the Solicitor General not agree that the sudden resignation of Mr. Mitchell is proof that Mohawk authorities are powerless when it comes to enforcing the law on their territory?

Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Solicitor General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, my colleague should ask Chief Mitchell, if he wants to know the reasons for his resignation. I can say that the RCMP has tried to enforce the law everywhere, and continues to do so, but I see no link between the resignation of Chief Mitchell and the work of police forces, including the Sûreté du Québec.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval): Mr. Speaker, should we conclude from the resignation of Mr. Mitchell and the assurance given by the Solicitor General that there would be no police action on Mohawk territory, that the government has given up enforcing the law on these territories and leaves a small band of armed men the opportunity to pursue, with total impunity, their criminal acts and illegal activities?

Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Solicitor General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, I never gave the assurance that there would be no police action on Mohawk reserves. I said exactly the opposite. I said that it was in the hands of the RCMP and that they would make their own decisions regarding inquiries and action if warranted. I never promised anyone that there would be no such action.

* * *

(1425)

*[English]***GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURES**

Mr. Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Deputy Prime Minister.

Oral Questions

Whatever proposals the budget contains for deficit reduction, most members agree that their effectiveness would be strengthened if Parliament had more and better tools to control over-spending.

Can the Deputy Prime Minister tell us whether the government has any specific plans and proposals for giving Parliament such tools and, if so, what those plans might be?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, the government House leader has already laid out his plans for making Parliament not only more accountable but more responsible to the needs of the taxpayers.

When the estimates are tabled, as they will be this week, I am sure the hon. member and his friends in the Reform Party will be as scrupulous and as active as are members of the government in ensuring that the taxpayers' dollars are well spent in every department.

Mr. Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest): A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. The Lambert commission recommended the introduction of sunset clauses whereby statutory authority to spend on certain programs would cease after five years unless Parliament voted specifically to renew.

Could the Deputy Prime Minister tell the House whether the government agrees in principle with sunset clauses as a tool to control government spending?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada is not waiting for sunsets to control spending. We are constantly reviewing the necessity for every program because we realize that the responsibility we have received from the taxpayers is to spend their dollars wisely every day, every month and every year.

Mr. Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest): Mr. Speaker, a further supplementary for the Deputy Prime Minister. The last Parliament, as some members will remember, considered a spending control act which provided that program spending would not exceed certain specified limits.

Could the Deputy Prime Minister tell the House whether the government agrees in principle with legislated spending controls as yet another tool for getting spending under control?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, the best legislated spending control that we are going to have is the budget that will be tabled tomorrow.

[*Translation*]

BUDGET

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot): Mr. Speaker, in the last stretch before the budget, all the signs are there that this government, which listens to the people, or so it says, will ignore the interests of Canadians and increase the tax burden on middle income families.

My question is directed to the Deputy Prime Minister. Would she agree that the direction her government appears to be taking goes against the very principles of fiscal fairness and economic recovery it apparently wants to defend?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, the government is not being hypocritical, but speaking of hypocrisy, on the weekend I heard the opposition's finance critic say we had to deal with our financial problems and do our best to take care of Canadian taxpayers, but we could not touch any programs that benefit the middle class or the government's tax programs or RRSPs. I have a question for the finance critic: How would he meet his commitment to balance Canada's budget?

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted with the Deputy Prime Minister's question, because it happens to be the same question we have been asking her government and the Minister of Finance since January 17.

Does the government intend to get the money where it is to be found, in other words, from Canada's big corporations which have not paid a penny in taxes since 1987, even when their profits are sky-high, and from the wealthiest Canadian families that use family trusts to avoid paying taxes? That is where the billions to cover the shortfall in the government's annual budget could be found.

Does her government intend to cut in those areas and spare middle income Canadians?

(1430)

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the finance critic for the Bloc Québécois would not, for instance, want us to touch the tax shelters available to the Fonds de solidarité. I believe there are a number of government instruments that are very important for economic development.

The member says we should review these tax shelters to deal with the problem, and of course we all agree that the tax burden should be shared. We cannot put the whole burden on only 2 per cent of the population because that is not going to solve the problem. We must all be prepared to do our share. I would like to see the opposition be part of this process, which will not be easy

Oral Questions

but which is necessary to guarantee our fiscal health and jobs for Canadians.

[Translation]

* * *

[English]

IMMIGRATION

Mr. Art Hanger (Calgary Northeast): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Deputy Prime Minister. This matter was brought to my attention by members of the Somali community and the media.

It appears that an alleged human rights abuser from the brutal Barre regime of Somalia now resides in the Ottawa area. When will the Deputy Prime Minister see to it that this individual is investigated and that these allegations of brutality are substantiated? If they are substantiated will deportation proceedings begin immediately?

Ms. Mary Clancy (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question and tell him that as we speak departmental officials are investigating these allegations.

There are provisions in the Immigration Act to remove persons who are senior officials of a government engaged in gross human rights violations. Should it be confirmed that this subject was a senior official of the Barre government, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration will ensure, as he has done in the past, that removal action is taken.

Mr. Art Hanger (Calgary Northeast): Mr. Speaker, a supplemental to the Deputy Prime Minister.

Last week I asked the minister of immigration how many more examples of abuse Canadians should have to tolerate. Stories of criminals and human rights abusers entering Canada surface regularly in the media despite the minister's assurances to the contrary.

When does the Deputy Prime Minister, or the Prime Minister for that matter, expect the immigration minister to start doing his job rather than leaving it to the media?

Ms. Mary Clancy (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, we can say the immigration minister is doing a superb job under due process of law.

This country has long been an open one and one that is delighted to receive immigrants and refugees from those countries not as fortunate as Canada and this process will continue.

There are laws in place and occasionally those laws are broken. When they are broken there is due process to ensure that offenders are punished to the fullest extent of the law. If this turns out to be the situation in the present case, then that will be the end result.

INCOME SECURITY

Mrs. Francine Lalonde (Mercier): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Human Resources Development.

On Friday, February 18 last, the minister announced the make-up of the expert committee which will have slightly less than two months to advise him on the ambitious proposed reform of Canada's income security system and labour market.

However, the House committee will have only 12 days to hear testimony from individuals and groups and to advise the minister on the concerns and priorities of Canadians.

Considering this unrealistic timetable, my question is will the minister concede that in fact, his action plan is already in place, that it is the same as the Conservatives and that he prefers to consult a committee of experts at \$500 per day rather than allow enough time for public consultations?

[English]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification): Mr. Speaker, I have far more confidence in the abilities of members of Parliament and the committee than the hon. member seems to have.

(1435)

The hon member should not underestimate the capacity of this Parliament to provide an open forum for Canadians to be heard, making sure there is broad consultation and to perform the valuable task of ensuring that a range of opinions from one coast to the other is clearly brought forward as the first stage in consultation. Then the committee can get on with a longer review of an action plan so there can be something specific.

The attempt by the hon. member to try to subvert or short change the work of this committee does not do much credit to her role as opposition critic. It is very important that Parliament get down to work and give Canadians an opportunity to be heard so that we can come together with the reform all Canadians want.

[Translation]

Mrs. Francine Lalonde (Mercier): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want the minister to know that my role as a parliamentarian on this committee cannot be questioned. I pushed for more time, but despite everything, we will still have only twelve days to conduct hearings.

I would also like to quote, if I may, from an article which appeared in this morning's edition of *The Globe and Mail*:

[English]

“Finance Minister Paul Martin has indicated that reducing Canada’s \$45 billion deficit will have to wait while the government deals with fundamental issues such as reforming the social safety net”.

[Translation]

My supplementary question is as follows: Will the minister concede that if he is in such a rush, it is because he wants to give the Minister of Finance the opportunity to make cuts in social programs next year?

[English]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification): Mr. Speaker, I say in response to the hon. member that may have been the agenda of the previous government. She could ask the leader of her own party about that because he was a member of that government.

However, that is certainly not the agenda of this government. Our agenda is to provide a more fair, just and equitable way to allow Canadians to get back to work, to have the opportunity to be properly supported and to make sure there is an up to date system, one that gives Canadians a real platform to fully participate in the life of this country.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Val Meredith (Surrey—White Rock—South Langley): Mr. Speaker, my question today is for the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

Canadian Press yesterday reported that the minister walked out of a meeting between the representatives of the Lesser Slave Lake band council and the Sawridge Indian band. Apparently the minister found the Sawridge band’s approach to aboriginal self-government unacceptable. As I understand it, the Sawridge proposals call for a municipal government approach and an opting out of the Indian Act.

Could the minister please tell the House today what he finds so objectionable about this approach?

Hon. Ron Irwin (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Mr. Speaker, the Sawridge bill does not address the issue of Bill C-31, returnees now before the court.

When the Sawridge bill came before the former government, probably aided and abetted by the former minister, it was not accepted by cabinet. It was not accepted by the Department of Justice which said that it did not respect the crown’s obligations to a band as a whole.

This was rejected by me, by my leader and by this government. We are looking at Bill C-31, the Cree nation as a whole

Oral Questions

when we say that the inherent right of self-government exists and we will work within that framework.

Ms. Val Meredith (Surrey—White Rock—South Langley): Mr. Speaker, the Sawridge band has put forward a practical approach to self-government, one that meets the needs of the Sawridge community.

Is the minister looking to impose a single model of aboriginal self-government on Canada’s native people, or is he open to negotiating agreements on a band by band basis?

Hon. Ron Irwin (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Mr. Speaker, we are looking at all the cultural aspects of self-government.

It is very serious. For instance, further north the elders pick the chiefs and sometimes when the chiefs get back to their villages they are no longer chiefs. With the Ojibways, the elders sit as advisers. With the Mohawks it is a longhouse culture. There is no one set model of self-government in this nation.

However, I will say that the Sawridge band is probably one of the richest bands in this country. It is sitting on tens of millions of dollars. That band is saying to its people that it will not share. That is not the way this government or Canadians should operate.

* * *

(1440)

[Translation]

FEDERAL GRANTS

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean): Mr. Speaker, in *La Presse* this morning, Mr. Jerry Peltier was reported to have received various federal subsidies both before and after becoming Grand Chief of Kanesatake. Apparently, in 1991, Mr. Peltier received in excess of \$58,000 over a period of just six months.

Could the Minister of Indian Affairs confirm these allegations to the effect that Mr. Peltier has been paid retroactively \$25,600 in fees for services rendered to the government during the Oka crisis?

[English]

Hon. Ron Irwin (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Mr. Speaker, if my hon. friend is going to ask that question he should ask his own leader. If the funds were paid inappropriately, they were paid during the tenure of a former government.

We have inherited this problem of overpayments. The accounting firm of Raymond, Chabot, Martin and Paré are in there addressing a problem we have inherited. It is developing a special relationship with the manager to address this problem.

If that particular leader was not there at that particular time, he was certainly there during the period the money was paid to that band. If the money was spent inappropriately the question

Oral Questions

by this hon. member should be why did his leader not address the problem when he was there and had the chance?

An accounting firm is addressing the problem. We are working on a management agreement. I am prepared to share the problems of the management agreement with the hon. member because we certainly do not want the problem or the overpayments to continue.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean): Mr. Speaker, I think that the minister has his dates wrong, because our leader was not a minister when those events took place; he had resigned before 1990. He could not have authorized that particular payment.

Could the minister tell us in what capacity Mr. Jerry Peltier worked for the Minister of Indian Affairs before the Oka crisis?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, they can claim all they want that the leader of the Leader of the Opposition was not in office exactly at the time of the Oka crisis, but in an article from the Saturday edition of *Le Soleil*, the president of the police association, Mr. Jocelyn Turcotte, is reported as stating that the smuggling problem on native reserves started in 1988, when the Leader of the Opposition was a member of the Mulroney cabinet.

If we go back as we did 100 days from today, it is obvious that this government is addressing a problem that has gone unaddressed for four years by our friend the Leader of the Opposition.

[English]

The Speaker: I know that all hon. members will be interested in things which have gone on before. However, I would ask that we restrict ourselves as much as possible to questions and answers for which this government is responsible. To the extent that we could do that, I am sure we could get questions and answers which would be acceptable to all participants.

* * *

NATIONAL ENERGY BOARD

Mr. Roger Gallaway (Sarnia—Lambton): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Natural Resources.

During January of this year the National Energy Board held lengthy meetings in southern Ontario as a result of an application made by Interprovincial Pipeline and Intercoastal Pipeline to extend a line from the U.S. to Canada.

Hundreds of landowners had legitimate concerns and wanted to intervene. The federal energy act has no provision for intervener funding. As a result of this line crossing the Canada—

U.S. border the applicant corporations did not have to pay intervener funding which amounted to millions of dollars. The farmers, school boards and other landowners were required to pay this out of their own pockets.

What will the minister do to persuade Interprovincial and Intercoastal Pipelines to pay reasonable costs of interveners? Does the minister have any plans to amend the legislation to ensure that this does not occur again?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Natural Resources): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member from Sarnia for his question. As the hon. member has pointed out, under the present National Energy Board Act there is no authorization for the National Energy Board to provide for reimbursement of expenses to interveners in these particular circumstances.

(1445)

Let me say, however, that the National Energy Board is very sensitive to the cost implications of these hearings and attempts to hold hearings in affected communities, as it did in this case, to ensure that costs are minimized and that we can maximize local community participation.

Let me also say that it is not possible for me to order the two pipeline companies the member has mentioned to pay or reimburse intervener expenses as there is no legal requirement for them to do so.

In conclusion, however, let me reassure the hon. member that I am very concerned about the issue he has raised. I have instructed my department to consider all feasible reimbursement mechanisms that we might look to in the future.

* * *

UNDERGROUNDECONOMY

Mrs. Jan Brown (Calgary Southeast): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of National Revenue.

A growing number of Canadians are joining the underground economy and evading taxes. The chairman of the finance committee suggests that it is the fault of the GST. On the other hand, the Minister of National Revenue suggests that chartered accountants and lawyers are somehow responsible.

Is the government looking for scapegoats or does it really know why the underground economy is exploding?

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of National Revenue): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. lady for her question, particularly as my wife who has two law degrees is sitting in the gallery today.

I would point out that the underground economy has many facets. We are attempting to deal with them as best we can on a number of fronts, including the smuggling we have talked about before, including increased enforcement, and including efforts to make sure the tax system is fairer.

I point out to her that the remarks I made with respect to the specific questions she asked me concerning lawyers and chartered accountants were simply that all people who cheat, no matter what their profession, are subject to investigations by Revenue Canada and to prosecution.

I assure her a distinction that was not made in some of the CBC reports on this interview was that there is no effort made to target any particular profession; only those people within professions who cheat and who cheat their fellow citizens by failing to pay their fair share of taxes.

Mrs. Jan Brown (Calgary Southeast): I have a supplementary question, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the Minister of National Revenue. I appreciate his lengthy response. However, I have to ask again does the revenue department have a real plan to reduce taxes in order to solve the problem of the underground economy?

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of National Revenue): Mr. Speaker, I apologize to the hon. member for the length of my reply, but the subject is a very important one involving many billions of dollars.

With respect to the supplementary question as to whether my department has a plan to reduce taxes, I can assure her we have many proposals which would make the tax system fairer. However issues as to a reduction of taxes and policies that might lead to reduction of taxes are the responsibility of the Minister of Finance who will be speaking on this very subject tomorrow afternoon.

* * *

[Translation]

INDIAN AFFAIRS

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Indian Affairs. Can he tell us what Jerry Peltier's responsibilities and status in the Department of Indian Affairs were during the Oka crisis in the fall of 1990?

[English]

Hon. Ron Irwin (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Mr. Speaker, the question is about what was his response at that time. We were not here at that time. I believe there are two members on the other side of the House who were. If my learned friend wants to ask them that question he might do it at the recess.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie): Mr. Speaker, again, this is for the Minister of Indian Affairs. I would like to know what he has to hide. What is he trying to avoid? Was this government elected to carry out its duties? Does this govern-

Oral Questions

ment not have all the information in hand? Does the minister not read the newspapers, does he not prepare to answer questions? What is this minister trying to hide from us?

(1450)

[English]

Hon. Ron Irwin (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Mr. Speaker, no matter how much yelling and how much clapping occurs over there, in no way, shape or form will they ever explain or rationalize that their leader was sitting here doing what he was complaining about at that time.

* * *

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Jack Frazer (Saanich—Gulf Islands): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Deputy Prime Minister.

A distinguished Canadian war hero and later head of the civil aviation department died in 1990 at age 75. Six months prior to his retirement Mervyn Mathew Fleming and his wife of 29 years were divorced but shortly thereafter were reunited and remarried.

Despite 37 years of marriage, because they were technically divorced when he retired Mrs. Fleming has been denied a widow's pension. In 1992 as leader of the opposition the Prime Minister agreed that this was wrong and promised to pursue the situation with Treasury Board.

Will the Deputy Prime Minister assure us the government will now take action to see justice done?

Hon. David Michael Collenette (Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs): Mr. Speaker, we are well aware of the problem. As the hon. member mentioned our leader has shown great concern about it.

I have had some discussions with the President of the Treasury Board because we are trying to see if there is a legal way that we can remedy what is a very unfortunate situation.

Mr. Jack Frazer (Saanich—Gulf Islands): I have a supplementary question, Mr. Speaker.

At age 77 Mrs. Fleming has recently been admitted to hospital with cancer. Will the hon. minister admit there is a sense of urgency to this matter?

Hon. David Michael Collenette (Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs): Yes, Mr. Speaker.

* * *

[Translation]

NATIONAL ARTS CENTRE

Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay (Rimouski—Témiscouata): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Deputy Prime Minister.

Oral Questions

We have been informed that the hasty departure of the National Arts Centre's director general, Mr. DesRochers, has cost taxpayers over \$350,000. On January 14, the board of directors decided to spend this staggering amount to fire Mr. DesRochers before his term had expired.

Does the Deputy Prime Minister not think that this \$350,000 pay-off is a shameful waste of public funds?

Ms. Albina Guarnieri (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Canadian Heritage): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member is aware, Mr. DesRochers was appointed by the National Arts Centre's board of directors during the previous government's mandate, and the decision to fire him was made within the powers granted to the board of directors.

The details of his contract are confidential. As the hon. member knows, it is inappropriate to comment on an internal management decision since the National Arts Centre is, as she knows very well, an independent crown corporation.

Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay (Rimouski—Témiscouata): Mr. Speaker, I am a little surprised to hear about the confidentiality because, although the director general is appointed by the board of directors, his salary is determined by the governor in council. So I am a little surprised about the confidentiality.

Does the Deputy Prime Minister not agree that this kind of waste could further undermine Canadians' trust in government institutions?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, it is obviously the government that determines salaries by order in council. It is also obvious that the Prime Minister has already ordered a review of all salary levels set by order in council to ensure that Canadian taxpayers' money is not wasted. It has already been done.

* * *

[English]

MINING

Mr. Benoît Serré (Timiskaming—French River): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Natural Resources.

On February 10 the bodies of the two miners who had been trapped underground at the Macassa Mine in Kirkland Lake were recovered. These men died as a result of a severe rockburst that occurred on November 26, 1993. Unfortunately such occurrences happen all too frequently and are extremely difficult to predict and to prevent.

(1455)

Is the minister prepared to allocate funding toward research and study of rockburst occurrences in order to reduce or prevent such tragedies in the future?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Natural Resources): Mr. Speaker, let me thank my colleague for his very important question and let me take the opportunity publicly in the House to express my deepest sympathies to the families of those who lost loved ones in the unfortunate rockburst at the Macassa Mine in Kirkland Lake.

Since 1984 my department has been actively involved in rockburst research. In 1990 funding for that program was extended for another five years in the amount of approximately \$10 million.

Let me say to the hon. member that my department and I understand the importance of this research to the safe future of mining in the country. Therefore I have every reason to believe my department will continue to be involved in this important area and continue to fund research in relation to rockbursts.

* * *

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. John Cummins (Delta): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans.

The Peat Marwick audit requested by Treasury Board of the expense accounts of the deputy minister of fisheries and oceans and his assistant deputy minister of policy absolves them of any wrongdoing. Yet, as the report acknowledges, they could not seem to manage their expense accounts in a careful and prudent manner.

Would the minister tell the House if the manner in which the deputy and his assistant have managed their expense accounts and have in fact managed taxpayers' dollars is consistent with his expectations for the management of his ministry?

Hon. Brian Tobin (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): Mr. Speaker, I know the hon. member would want me to be absolutely crystal clear in the major findings of the report which was conducted entirely outside government, not by the department of fisheries, not by Treasury Board, but as the member pointed out by Peat Marwick Thorne and by the chief forensic auditor of that firm.

The major findings were two: first, that all of the travel in question had been authorized by the minister of the day and, second, that all expenses claimed were in compliance with Treasury Board guidelines.

Mr. John Cummins (Delta): Mr. Speaker, the terms of reference in the Peat Marwick report were: "The goal of the review was to determine whether the deputy minister and the assistant deputy minister had respected government travel and hospitality policies, not to excuse their conduct".

Would the minister not agree that to offer an opinion as to the appropriateness of the deputy minister and the assistant deputy minister's conduct goes beyond the terms of reference of the audit and beyond the capabilities of the auditor?

Hon. Brian Tobin (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): Mr. Speaker, I would say to the hon. member that it is quite extraordinary to have an audit conducted by an outside auditor, by a chief forensic auditor, and to have such a straightforward conclusion arrived at.

It is my view that once the conclusion is arrived at—and we are dealing with senior public officials—it is then the responsibility of members of Parliament and the responsibility of those who made allegations which caused this investigation to occur in the first place either to accept the advice of an independent auditor or to bring new evidence forward.

We ought not to call into question the reputations of long serving public servants for our own political advantage at any given point in time.

* * *

[Translation]

MINING EXPLORATION

Mr. Bernard Deshaies (Abitibi): Mr. Speaker, the mining sector, one of the most important in terms of jobs and economic benefits, is currently in a very serious situation. In 1987 the federal government decided to reduce its fiscal effort regarding flow-through shares, which were designed to boost mining exploration. This unfortunate decision, which was denounced among others by the Quebec government, is a major cause of the serious problems experienced by this sector.

My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources. Does the minister agree that a recovery of the mining exploration sector can only occur by increasing flow-through shares to 133 per cent?

(1500)

[English]

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Natural Resources): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question. Let me say that ours was the only party in the last election that produced a mining policy. In that policy we are committed in the coming years to review a number of options which we hope will once again make the mining industry a viable and profitable one.

* * *

THE BUDGET

Mr. Philip Mayfield (Cariboo—Chilcotin): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance and is inspired by Mr. Earl Christenson of Oshawa, Ontario.

Many Canadians are suspicious that senior bureaucrats and politicians favour eliminating the lifetime \$100,000 capital gains exemption because they have already taken advantage of it.

Routine Proceedings

Will the minister quell this public cynicism by committing to preserve this one-time \$100,000 exemption.

An hon. member: You should talk to your leader.

Hon. Douglas Peters (Secretary of State (International Financial Institutions)): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance will bring down the budget tomorrow at five o'clock, just 26 hours from now. Any comment on it will be reserved for that time.

* * *

FISHERIES

Hon. Roger Simmons (Burin—St. George's): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my friend and compatriot who has freshly arrived from his success in Brussels with the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization, for which I congratulate him and the government.

The point is that there were three abstentions, the European Union, Norway and Denmark. I wonder if the minister would take a moment to tell us what is going to happen. What are he and the government going to do to see that those three comply? Failing that, what is plan B? What happens if they do not comply?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of fisheries.

Mr. Simmons: Mr. Speaker, do not forget the oceans. They are kind of short of fish but they are still there.

Hon. Brian Tobin (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague and friend for his question. I want to assure him because I know of his particular interest in this matter, having one of the largest fishing constituencies in Canada, that we have received assurances from the European Union, Denmark and Norway, even though they abstained on the vote which put in place a moratorium on 3NO cod stocks, it is their intention to abide by the decision of NAFO not to use the objection procedure. It means that the government, as was committed by the Prime Minister, has achieved a beginning in the battle against overfishing.

It is not the end of the battle but it is a first important victory because of the tough and determined new position of this government with respect to the resources of the ocean.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

EXCISE TAX ACT

Hon. Douglas Peters (for the Minister of Finance) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-13, an act to amend the Excise Tax Act and a related act.

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

Routine Proceedings

(1505)

*[Translation]***PETITIONS**

MARALOÏ FAMILY

Mr. Jean-Paul Marchand (Québec-Est): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table a petition signed by more than 2,000 people from my riding of Québec-Est and from several regions of Quebec.

The petitioners want to draw Parliament's attention to the situation of the Maraloï family, now living in Vanier. This family has been in Canada for three years, is fully integrated to the Quebec community, and is self-supporting. That family was denied the right to remain in Canada, and it is believed that its members will be in serious danger if they return to Romania.

Therefore, the petitioners ask Parliament to convince the Minister of Immigration to reconsider his department's decision to deport the Maraloï family and allow that family to remain in Canada. I give my full support to that petition and I urge the government to act on it.

[English]

MARKHAM—WHITCHURCH—STOUFFVILLE

Mr. Ed Harper (Simcoe Centre): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of 30,000 and more residents of the constituency of Markham—Whitchurch—Stouffville, I present the following petition with an estimated 30,000 names affixed.

This petition reads as follows: "To the House of Commons and Parliament assembled, we the undersigned residents of the electoral district of Markham—Whitchurch—Stouffville draw the attention of the House to the following: that our elected member of Parliament was given a mandate by his constituents to sit as a member of the Liberal caucus and, effective January 28, 1994, resigned his membership in the Liberal caucus as a result of a request by the Prime Minister of Canada to do so; that our member has admitted to inexcusable behaviour involving former employees and that this information was withheld from the electorate before his election; that our member intentionally misrepresented his credentials to the electorate and to the Liberal Party of Canada; that our member has stated that he will continue to sit in the House as an independent member despite requests for his resignation by an overwhelming majority of his constituents including the undersigned; and that we the petitioners have absolutely lost all respect and confidence in our member to represent us—

The Deputy Speaker: The member perhaps does not realize that he is not to read the whole petition. Would he please sum up in one sentence.

Mr. Harper (Simcoe Centre): Mr. Speaker, I am assured that many thousands more names will be sent along shortly on this matter. I present 30,000 petitioners.

THE SENATE

Mr. Vic Althouse (Mackenzie): Mr. Speaker, I have another 850 to 900 names affixed to a petition noting that the Senate is unelected, unaccountable and home for recipients of Liberal and Tory patronage.

The petitioners note that sections 41 and 42 of the Constitution Act provides that an amendment to the Constitution of Canada in relation to these matters may be initiated by the House of Commons. Therefore they call on the House to initiate a resolution to abolish the Senate.

[Translation]

RURAL POSTAL SERVICES

Mr. François Langlois (Bellechasse): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, I have the pleasure of submitting a petition signed by the postmaster of my parish of Sainte-Claire-de-Dorchester, and by residents of that parish. The petitioners ask not for an indefinite moratorium on postal services in rural areas, but for a permanent policy regarding postal services. They also ask that postal services be reinstated in rural parishes where it was eliminated because of the previous government's ineptitude.

* * *

(1510)

*[English]***WAYS AND MEANS**

NOTICE OF MOTION

Hon. Douglas Peters (Secretary of State (International Financial Institutions)): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 83(1) I wish to table a notice of a ways and means motion to amend the Excise Tax Act and I ask that an order of the day be designated for consideration of the motion.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

(Questions answered orally are indicated by an asterisk.)

Mr. Peter Milliken (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Today, Mr. Speaker, marks the beginning of answers. Question No. Q-3 will be answered.

[Text]

Question No. 3—**Mr. Taylor (The Battleford-Meadow Lake):**

Supply

What is the government's intention with regard to the Environmental assessment act (1992 statutes, c. 37), and what steps have been taken, since October 26, 1993, to deal with the regulations and the proclamation of this act?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, as noted in the speech from the throne, the government is committed to proclaiming the Canadian environmental assessment act as soon as possible. Further, in the red book, "Creating Opportunity—The Liberal Plan for Canada" and its accompanying backgrounder on environmental issues, a commitment was made to strengthen and enhance the act after proclamation. The government intends to keep its commitments.

The four regulations essential to the implementation of the act were published in part 1 of the Canada Gazette on September 17, 1993. The period for public comment was to expire on November 17, 1993, but, noting concerns expressed by Canadians, the government extended the comment period to December 17, 1993. The comments received have been compiled by the Federal Environmental Assessment Review Office (FEARO) and changes to the regulations based on these comments and the government's commitments are currently being prepared. These changes as well as the amendments promised will be examined by the government shortly.

The act must be proclaimed quickly in order to reduce the uncertainty associated with the application of the guidelines order now in force.

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: The question as enumerated by the parliamentary secretary has been answered.

Mr. Milliken: I ask, Mr. Speaker, that the remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Deputy Speaker: Shall the remaining questions stand?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY—PETITIONS

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Miss Deborah Grey (Beaver River): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in the debate today on our supply motion. I will be speaking specifically to paragraph (c):

a petition which will be presented requesting the government to bring forward a bill which would make recall of members of the House of Commons a part of the law.

Parliamentary reform has been a subject of intense interest in the House for many years. Our party, in response to the views of the Canadian public, has proposed several measures and several reforms designed to restore powers to Parliament and improve the state of representative democracy.

Representative democracy is improved when citizens are both willing and able to express their views to us as their representatives. I say willing in the sense that Canadians must believe that their views will be received by us, their views will be listened to by us, and their views will be seriously considered by us.

Regrettably many Canadians do not participate in the political process. Too many have become disillusioned, alienated and cynical about the entire political process. Those who actively participate in the political process, who still believed that an aroused and informed citizenry can make a difference, should be given every encouragement, should be given every reasonable means to express their views. That is why we chose this topic today.

A citizens' petition is an ancient, traditional and sensible way for ordinary citizens to put their views before their government. We should encourage its use. One form of citizens' petition that the House can and should adopt as soon as possible is a citizens' petition for recall. It is my firm belief that recall legislation would provide voters with a greater sense of control over their representatives between elections. Recall would provide a means to counter the feelings of cynicism and alienation expressed by many Canadian voters about politicians, political parties and government.

Recall would provide a disillusioned electorate with an instrument and a public process for some sort of practical action. Recall would enhance the role of constituents between elections and hence would improve dialogue between constituents and their representatives. Both parliamentarians and their constituents would be winners. Recall legislation would improve representative democracy.

Members of Parliament should have nothing to fear from the introduction of recall legislation. Sensible provisions would be included in the legislation to prevent superfluous or mischievous use of this democratic reform. For example, a petition must be signed by a sufficiently high number of electors in a constituency to prevent mischief. Second, there would be a grace period after the general election before a recall petition would kick in. Third, a recall measure could only be used once per constituency, per term of an elected Parliament. Fourth, the recall process would be subject to strict regulation, verified by the Chief Electoral Officer, for example, procedures for verifying that all signatures are genuine and obtained through legitimate means. If that did not happen, a fairly severe fine would be in place.

Supply

(1515)

When talking about recall we need to say this is not something radical we are just thinking about doing now in Canada's Parliament. The citizens of ancient Athens had a democratic process to ostracize wayward politicians through banishment from Athens for a period of 10 years.

Think of the number of members in this place. If our constituents were displeased with us they would banish us, or shun us to use a cultural term from my area, for 10 years. That certainly would make us consider strongly what kind of representatives we were.

Some writers say this ancient process is the foundation for recall legislation we are discussing today. Recall has been a facet of the Swiss system of direct democracy for a long period of time. Fifteen U.S. states employ recall for elected state officials; 36 provide for recall of locally elected officials. No American state has ever repealed recall legislation once it was established. Recall has only been used successfully nine or ten times in that entire history. Obviously the system is not abused.

The recall mechanism utilized in Alberta in 1936 was incorporated into a public law, but it had its defects. The Alberta recall bill was mentioned earlier, but in this case the law was too easily open to abuse by opposition parties and interest groups, and we have heard lots about them today.

For example, the bill contained no provision prohibiting the purchase of signatures for a recall petition. Its first use was marred by this abuse when a group of Calgary lawyers reportedly offered the good citizens of High River up to \$5 a signature to sign a recall petition against the premier. It is for that reason among many others whereby we believe very sound safeguards should be in place.

When the Alberta recall bill was repealed by the Alberta legislature, it was done by a free vote. The premier at the time, William Aberhart, voted against that repeal, as did Ernest C. Manning, who was a cabinet minister at the time. The repeal was carried by a majority of the backbenchers who considered the bill to be defective.

Some opponents of recall claim that members are elected primarily to carry out a mandate as detailed in their party's election platform and must often sacrifice the good of their constituents for the good of the whole. Recall, they claim, would encourage short term or parochial thinking to the detriment of the whole.

Reformers agree that members must consider factors solely beyond the wishes of their constituents, but stress that a member's primary duty should not be to the party but to the constituents, to represent their concerns, their needs and their interests.

Thomas E. Cronin, in his discussion of the pros and cons of recall in his book entitled *Direct Democracy: The Politics of Initiative, Referendum and Recall*, published by Harvard University Press, 1989, states:

Today's critics of the recall device continue to view it as an invitation to unruly, impatient action and as a potential hazard to representative government. They also say it is another media age factor that could weaken the party system. No evidence exists to support either contention.

That bears repeating. Thomas Cronin said that no evidence exists to support either contention.

Power may not always corrupt, yet it does have this tendency. Recall strikes at incumbent arrogance.

All of us in this place must pay attention to that. We must perk up our ears when we hear a sentence like that. It touches all of us because we are elected officials. Recall strikes at incumbent arrogance.

I stand here in this Chamber today talking about MP recall not as an outsider, but as someone who has been elected once, in fact re-elected once also in the general election of October 1993. I am subject to MP recall as is every other member in this House. Therefore it cannot be said this is someone who is criticizing the process from the outside.

In summary, as parliamentarians we should encourage citizens to express their views at all times and by all legitimate means. The citizens petition remains a valid and legitimate means. Its use should be respected and encouraged. The petition for recall would enable our citizens to rid themselves of those who violate their trust. It would encourage members to be more responsive to the views of their constituents and enhance the role of ordinary parliamentarians. It would promote representative democracy in this nation.

(1520)

Let me conclude with a couple of comments from the *Globe and Mail*, February 19, 1994. Kenneth Whyte in his article entitled "The West" says that the real problem with the government's response to all the questions we have asked in the last several weeks about representative democracy, member of Parliament recall, whether the government would allow a referendum on the issue of physician assisted suicide, is that it demonstrates the government has not a clue about what it is dealing with. He says that the issues of referenda and recall are of enormous symbolic importance. Nothing could be more true. He went on to say: "The bottom line is that traditional political institutions will either open themselves to greater public participation or lose still more credibility".

Mr. Speaker, I lay it before you that MP recall is something we will need before the life of this Parliament is out.

Mr. Dennis J. Mills (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Industry): Mr. Speaker, I begin by acknowledging the member as someone who has always been a strong advocate of

Supply

reform and works very aggressively in this House and not just during the last Parliament.

Let me be specific. Does the hon. member not believe when a member of Parliament is accused of something not suitable for this House that he or she should be subject to due process? What criteria would the hon. member use to put the recall process into motion?

Miss Grey: Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend from Broadview—Greenwood. We have agreed on many things and I suspect on this issue probably we are not totally in disagreement.

We had a chat earlier about the whole idea of what due process is. If we were to look at a particular example—we would be naive if we did not address it—there is a situation in front of us in which we are looking at a member's credentials.

When talking about the due process of law, I am all in favour of that. I am sure both sides of this House are. The question would be what I asked my hon. friend this morning. I will ask him again. I know he cannot respond but I am sure many others will talk about this as the day goes on.

Why was due process not followed initially in the case of the member for Markham—Whitchurch—Stouffville? If this had gone through due process we would have seen that. If the issue of credentials was the only thing in question perhaps it would have been short circuited had the Prime Minister gone through due process by looking at the credentials and saying he would hold off on a decision until he had reviewed the situation.

It is a pretty big step to throw someone out of caucus. We witnessed it in the last Parliament. We have witnessed it here again.

Mr. Mills (Broadview—Greenwood): He resigned.

Miss Grey: Let us make sure that due process is followed on both sides of the issue and not just from one.

In terms of the criteria for the process of recall, we would need 50 per cent plus one of the number of voters who cast their ballots in the last election and there would be a waiting time, a period of grace as mentioned in my Bill C-210. It talks about a waiting period of 18 months. I will add an amendment which says that unless blatant misrepresentation has happened it could be triggered earlier. It would only happen once in the life of a Parliament so we would not be able to gang up on people over and over again.

Mr. John Bryden (Hamilton—Wentworth): Mr. Speaker, I would like to move the debate away from individuals and into the theoretical if I may do so. I am a historian by avocation. One of the things I have observed in my reading is that dictatorships as in the cases of Hitler and Mussolini are always founded in support from the people, usually massive support. Once dicta-

torships have captured the imagination of the people that tremendous support is used to implement things that are contrary to democracy.

(1525)

When it comes to something like this petition I see a danger when there is a very popular government. Would the hon. member for Beaver River be afraid that a government could take advantage of its popularity, get a petition and get rid of the dissenters thereby getting rid of the very people we would want to have in a democracy.

Miss Grey: Mr. Speaker, I must confess I am not a historian. It seems to me that my entire speech was theoretical and it was only in response to a question from the hon. member for Broadview—Greenwood that we got into any specifics.

Maybe it is a weakness in this Parliament in always talking about things theoretically, who knows. Let us be very clear about this danger to which the hon. member refers. If there is such a thing as a popular government, certainly maybe in the first 100 days it might be popular until it starts making demands on the public purse for instance. That is obviously what hurts people the most.

Let us look at this specifically. The referendum a year ago indicated the specific mood of the people. They want power in their hands. I was asked if I see a danger in that. No, I do not. I do not think there is any danger whatsoever in being able to relinquish power, saying that this is what we think is important but we turn it over to the common sense of the people right across the country. The only thing that would be dangerous would be not to do that.

I am always asked what the cost would be to check names and signatures on recall. I fire back the rhetorical question what is the cost if we do not do it? We see what is happening in this country from sea to sea. The people think their elected representatives are floating away.

I do believe there is a real danger and a real cost of not instituting these essential parliamentary reforms which should be instituted in the life of this Parliament.

Mr. Dan McTeague (Ontario): Mr. Speaker, I wish to commend the hon. member for Beaver River on her insights in terms of recall, but we do come back to this issue again and again.

Earlier the hon. member's colleagues made reference to the citations of the great parliamentarian Edmund Burke. The suggestion was that Edmund Burke lost his election after he made the famous statements about judgment versus rubber stamp.

That is what members are elected to do. In my riding over 45,000 people elected me. I was a candidate who wished to stand on the principle of judgment, that my best principles and my

Supply

best ideas are put forward and to the extent possible I am able to represent majority as well as minority interests.

Since the hon. member has spent a considerable amount of time on this issue, given that Edmund Burke was never defeated, given that two members of her caucus have suggested that Mr. Burke was defeated, and that he ran consecutively from 1765 until 1794 for all ridings of Wendover, Bristol, Malton—Yorkshire in that period of time would she not agree that the system proposed under recall is one that smacks—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Beaver River.

Miss Grey: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. To my friend from Ontario, I appreciate his comments but I think we are just about out of time.

Edmund Burke probably has been mentioned more today than, who knows, when he was in the House. Maybe he was in for a long period of time. We are looking at many years ago in England. Certainly with the advent of television if nothing else, politics now goes into people's homes and they need to talk about it.

Although I am sure Edmund Burke was a wonderful fellow, he believed firmly in the mandate theory: You have given me a mandate; I have come to serve you. We are not just mandated or delegated. We need a fine balance saying: "If in my judgment this carries the weight of the people, yes I will give my judgment, but if in fact there could be a clear consensus that my constituents are instructing me in a particular way I must do that or I will go the road of Edmund Burke".

(1530)

Mr. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate this afternoon in the debate on an opposition motion. The opposition, at least the third party in this Parliament, starts off with the premise that Parliament, as an institution, is broken. Parliament is not broken.

Yes, the previous government lost the trust of the Canadian people. Yes, it was defeated because it lost that trust. However, that is not to say the institution itself is wrong. I say that to both parties across the way. I see that in their speeches, in their comments and elsewhere.

When I hear from members of the Reform Party that Parliament as an institution needs to be turned completely upside down and changed because it does not work, I say they are wrong. When members of the Bloc Quebecois say that they think the country should separate because people disliked the previous government, I say they too are wrong. What was wrong was not Parliament. What was wrong was not this great institution. What was wrong was the public office holders of the last

Parliament and that is not the same. It is high time we started to think on those terms.

I read this motion today. Listen to it, Mr. Speaker, you who are so knowledgeable in all our rules. It states:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should consider the advisability of amending the Standing Orders—

Whoever heard of anything so preposterous. The government does not have standing orders, the House has standing orders. I say to my colleagues across the way, many of whom have not been members very long, surely they could learn that the rules of the House are the rules of the House and not the rules of the government. Changing the rules is not done by the government. If the government decided to change the rules arbitrarily they would be the first to criticize.

[*Translation*]

The standing orders of this House are amended by and on the advice of a parliamentary committee which usually presents a unanimous report to the House. This committee report is tabled in the House and adopted by the House and then the rules of procedure are changed.

[*English*]

Some members will remember in the last Parliament when the then government took a report from a standing committee on amending the rules and chose to adopt only some of the rule changes. It was condemned by everyone, not because it had changed rules unilaterally but because it had not changed all of the rules at once as recommended in the unanimous report. It had upset the balance which is so vital to ensuring that the government can govern and that the opposition can hold the government to account. That was seen as wrong.

The member across the way and her colleagues are proposing that the government on its own change the standing orders of the House. With due respect, it is absurd. It is completely absurd that a government would try to do that.

The member wants the government, in changing the rules unilaterally, perhaps even against the wishes of the oppositions, to produce some sort of a formula to debate and to vote on petitions.

I bring members' attention to today's Order Paper of the House of Commons. I highly recommend it to members of Parliament. It is a very useful document. It tells how this place works.

(1535)

Like many other members, I have Motion M-218 on today's Order Paper.

[*Translation*]

I can see for instance that the hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie has one, and so does the hon. member for An-

Supply

jou—Rivière—des—Prairies. It is unusual that not one member from the Reform Party has a motion on the Order Paper of the House. None, not one member from the Reform Party.

An hon. member: It is impossible.

Mr. Boudria: Yes, yes, it is true. None of them does.

[*English*]

Does the member realize that she and her colleagues can take the contents of a petition and put it up for debate through this mechanism? It is at page IV of the Order Paper. The process already exists. We can put a motion on any subject and ask that it be debated in the House, including the subject of a petition.

I have put a motion on the Order Paper that reads:

That this House affirm its support for Section 241 of the Criminal Code of Canada which forbids the counselling, procuring, aiding, or abetting of a person to commit suicide—

I do not think we should change that provision. The member and I can disagree on that point when we can debate it. We can debate whether the point originated in a petition or elsewhere and we will vote on it in the House. That provision exists right now pursuant to our rules.

Why are we offered this suggestion today? We already have the means to do it.

[*Translation*]

The hon. member tells us that she wants the Young Offenders Act changed, but did she put a bill on the Order Paper asking for such a change? As you know, all the members of this House can put forward private members' bills, bills which will then be debated and voted on by this House. Is there a need to create some new mechanism? Not at all. Mechanisms already exist and all these tools are already available to this House.

[*English*]

No, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps our rules need to be changed and modified. I sit on the committee that deals with such matters, along with my colleague from Kingston and the Island, our colleague across the way and others. Many of them have done good work. However, some people are sucking and blowing at the same time.

On Friday we proposed to change the prayer that we say in this House. Who was the first to complain? A member of the Reform Party said we should not touch it. It was a unanimous report of the committee voted on by the House. Even that was seen as being inappropriate even though it had the consent of virtually everyone.

When members across the way talk about changing our institution, we agree. We have made it part of our red book. However, we want those changes to occur based on the consent of members of the House for the betterment of this institution,

not just in a way to sell the doctrine to the people back in the riding that some have come here to Ottawa to turn this place upside down.

The right to petition Parliament that has been talked about today existed in British parliamentary democracy since 1669. It has been a very important tool. I have used it. I have tabled petitions in this House. On Thursday I will be tabling 100,000 signatures on petitions asking for the banning the importation of the serial killer board game.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Boudria: What did I do? I put a bill on the Order Paper asking to do just that, Bill C-203 if members will read their Order Paper again. Bill C-203 proposes to ban the importation of that product by modifying the Criminal Code. Those 150,000 signatures I will be tabling plus the 50,000 I have tabled already are a testimony to the kind of support that initiative has.

Therefore, I can ask my colleagues to vote on this. I will be using the mechanisms of petition to demonstrate that which I am proposing is worth while.

(1540)

What is the motion we are debating today supposed to do? It is supposed to give us an opportunity to vote on such things as the Young Offenders Act. That act requires no royal recommendation, so any private member can have a bill to change it. Any member can introduce a private member's motion to deal with a petition. Finally, on the issue of the serial killer cards, I have a parallel initiative right now on the Order Paper of this House.

[*Translation*]

So, as you can see Mr. Speaker, it is not all to present motions because someone who perhaps was not too familiar with the procedure of this House could be led to believe that Parliament presently has none of the tools mentioned in this particular motion, while in fact it is quite the contrary. All these tools that the hon. member from the Reform Party for Edmonton Southwest is requesting are already available to the House. All of them without any exception already exist as described in his motion.

[*English*]

Today the member for Beaver River introduced something new. She said: we should have recall mechanisms. That has nothing to do with this motion of course, although I profoundly disagree with it.

Miss Grey: I rise on a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I hate to be rude and interrupt, but our motion, first of all if it had been out of order, as this member has stated, would have been ruled out of order and inappropriate by the Table.

Second, the hon. member has now had a few seconds to read it, my speech was entirely on paragraph (c) in the motion.

Supply

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member has made her point. I think we all appreciate that is a matter of debate rather than a point of order.

Mr. Boudria: Mr. Speaker, I rest my case about people learning about the rules of this place. When members purport to claim a point of order because they disagree with the content of the speech of another member it is not a point of order. In most cases—

The Deputy Speaker: Perhaps the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, rather than trying to rub it into somebody, might get on with debate rather than go back to the point of order.

Mr. Boudria: Mr. Speaker, as I was saying before I was so rudely interrupted by the member across the way, the motion today proposes to give to the House the possibility of voting on petitions. All of that too exists now.

I say to the hon. member, read Beauchesne, read the standing orders, read the Order Paper and then members who propose initiatives like this will know that those tools exist already.

Finally, it is wrong for us to pretend in a motion or otherwise that the standing orders of the House are the standing orders of the government. That is wrong. The standing orders of the House belong to the House.

I sat in opposition for a very long time and defended the privileges of this House on numerous occasions. When it was the government trying to run roughshod over the rights of MPs never in my wildest dreams would I have thought that an opposition member would be asking for those things that normally government members do not even dare to ask.

Members of the House should vote against this motion. They should soundly defeat a motion that pretends that the standing orders of the House are the orders of the government and not the standing orders of Parliament. Members should vote to change the rules pursuant to reports from the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. A member of the Reform Party sits on that committee.

We have just started our work. We have done good work as a committee.

(1545)

If a report from such a committee proposes to change the rules of the House and the report of the committee is not even unanimous, we will see, mark my words, that the same members who are now proposing that the government change the standing orders would rise in their seats in defiance if the government even tried to do that with all members of the committee except one who was perhaps dissident on a report.

That is the irony of what we see today.

[*Translation*]

The motion before us today should not be adopted.

I conclude by reiterating that it is not the same thing, and all the members of this House should be aware of the difference, to say that the previous government had lost the confidence of the Canadian people as to say that Parliament, as an institution, does not work.

[*English*]

This is one of the greatest freedoms that we have, to have an institution like this which has evolved from time immemorial, from the days prior to the Norman invasion of Britain. As my colleague the historian will know, there was even a form of representative institution in the days of the Witan, prior to the Norman invasion of Britain. This institution has evolved for perhaps 1,500 years.

Just like when I sat across the way, as I now sit in government I want the changes to the rules to be changes that are acceptable to the House, to make us respond better to the wishes of our constituents, and to make us as well better equipped to make wise and sound decisions for those who have sent us here to speak on their behalf.

Miss Deborah Grey (Beaver River): Mr. Speaker, I would like to make this short. We are not demanding that the government change the standing orders. If the motion is read carefully, I will state that the government should consider the advisability; in other words, seek unanimous consent throughout the House if this is something wise.

Again I say, not on a point of order but as a comment, that if this were out of order it would have been ruled out of order by the table.

Second, my hon. friend said in concluding his remarks that he encourages his colleagues to vote against this. Is he aware that this is a non-votable motion, as it says so clearly at the bottom line?

Mr. Boudria: Mr. Speaker, I am perfectly aware of the fact that no vote was sought, although the opposition has the right to seek votes on any opposition motion. Such a vote would be a vote of confidence.

Second, it is not a matter of whether the motion itself is out of order. Of course it is not out of order. As a matter of fact, placing the words “consider the advisability” in any motion makes it virtually always in order. As one who has proposed a number of motions when I sat across the way, whenever in doubt include the words “consider the advisability” and one will be pretty well always safe, as the Speaker will know.

By including words like that it is obviously not out of order. That does not mean that the motion is worthy of support or that its contents are appropriate or that they are those which should be adopted by the government or by the House or anyone else.

Supply

Mr. Ted White (North Vancouver): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member started his speech by stating that the Reform Party thinks Parliament is broken. I would just like to inform him that we do not really think it is broken, we just think it needs a little refurbishing.

We want more openness in this Parliament and we want more opportunity to allow the people of Canada in this information age to have more input into this House and to be able to see that we are actively debating issues that are of importance to them.

The hon. member knows that the rules are changed by the government, in effect, because it has the voting power in this House. The standing order will be changed only with the approval of the government. The member also knows that motions on the Order Paper are extremely unlikely, by sheer volume, to ever come up for debate.

The hon. member consistently refuses to agree to a new system that would bring better representation for his constituents. I would like to ask the member why he is afraid to debate petitions in this House in front of television cameras. Is he afraid that his constituents might see that he does not represent them properly in this House?

An hon. member: What was your last majority, Don?

(1550)

Mr. Boudria: Mr. Speaker, my colleague reminds me that the electors of Glengarry—Prescott—Russell were kind enough to send me here with a substantial majority. We are equal as members, whether elected by one vote or two votes or whether the majority was larger, as I was fortunate enough to have received in the last election. Once we are here we are all equal and I recognize that.

I made the case to the House and to the member that there exists a procedure right now through which the content of any petition can become votable through a motion. There is not one motion on the Order Paper in the name of any Reform Party MP. I have a copy of the Order Paper in front of me. It has six motions by the member for Richelieu who is a Bloc Québécois member, one from the member for Winnipeg North, one from your humble servant from Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, two from the member for Kamloops, one from the member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie, one from the member for Saskatoon—Clark's Crossing, and one from the member for Anjou—Rivière-des-Prairies. None of those ridings is represented by the Reform Party.

Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island): Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that I listened with great intent to the member opposite and I understand that the Liberals during the last campaign as shown in the red book were very eager to turn around this misconception or mistrust that the Canadian people have in government./

They included things which I referred to earlier today regarding the fact that people are irritated with governments that do not consult them.

My question is if the member is so opposed to the proposals we are putting forward in terms of referendum, recall, and today we are talking about the question of petitions, what does he propose as an alternative to open up government to the Canadian people as they seem to be demanding and as the red book acknowledges?

Mr. Boudria: Mr. Speaker, I hate to put it this way but I am going to repeat this slowly.

The motion today asked the government to change the rule of the House—this is the first thing that is wrong with it—in order for us to have a vote on petitions. There is already such a mechanism and many members have availed themselves of the privilege of putting motions before the House—everyone except Reform Party MPs.

If they need any help with drafting those motions I will gladly go across and give them a hand.

The Deputy Speaker: I think the time has expired. I would hope that members would understand that the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell and I were in the last House and, with respect, the kind of comment he just made a moment ago is one reason we got into trouble in the last House.

I hope that members would avoid that sort of comment in the future.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maurice Godin (Châteauguay): Mr. Speaker, the first provision of the standing orders of the House of Commons that we should deplore is of course the one that allows a political party to table around two o'clock on Friday afternoon a motion to be debated the following Monday morning.

Standing Order 43, which allows such little notice, should be the subject of today's debate because it shows the weakness when some groups in Parliament are not guided by a sense of fair play. But let that pass. This motion gives us an opportunity to dwell on our role as members of Parliament. We do not intend to deal with specific cases that were presented as examples in support of the motion today.

What I want to do today is to deal with the nature of a petition, its meaning, the origin of such a form of representation to Parliament and the attitude we should have toward such means of communication which more often than not show that considerable effort was made to reach us as elected members.

When the parliamentary system began in Canada with the Constitution Act, 1791, citizens' groups clearly understood that they could express their grievances and demands by appending their signatures to a joint declaration. Petitions are an integral part of the political system, whereas the actions of members and

Supply

their respective parties are not influenced either by the electronic media or by laws governing lobbyists.

(1555)

In the purest sense, a petition is a mechanism employed by a group of citizens who agree on a problem and on how it should be resolved. Quite often, sound ideas translate into co-operative efforts. In many cases, petitions have reflected a good deal of common sense and quite aside from broad expert analyses, they have often brought to light alternatives that legislative assemblies had not thought of or had not dared contemplate.

We must, however, consider the flip side of this issue. We are not fools and each one of us has seen petitions supported by organizations with significant resources, and capable therefore of producing a disproportionate number of petitions, more than could be processed.

In today's highly technological, computerized and mediated society, it is more important than ever to distinguish public interest from personal interest, and actions taken in good faith from those taken with a personal goal in mind. The whole issue of petitions opens the door to a much broader issue, namely that of representations made to those who wield legislative power.

Last week, a documentary called "Les chemins de l'influence" was shown on Radio-Canada's *Le Point*. This program clearly showed how lobbyists are organized and how they go about influencing decision-makers. When compared to such specialized lobbying techniques, petitions come across as the poor relation, to say the least. Yet, lobbyists are never directly quoted in the House of Commons, even though we know full well what kind of influence they have on those in power. The program I just mentioned gave the example of the pharmaceutical industry which succeeded in securing commitments from the Mulroney government and from the Minister of National Health and Welfare, Benoit Bouchard, by dangling before their eyes the promise of job spinoffs and major investments.

Would a petition have been as effective in this instance? Would it have produced the hoped-for results? Certainly not! Why then do people persist in using petitions to make requests of the government? No doubt they do so for two reasons. First, for lack of an alternative, because this is the only means available to them to get the government's attention. Then, since it is probably preferable, from a moral standpoint, to act openly through a very public request instead of going through the corridors of power.

A petition, however visible, remains in current practice something that is merely tabled. Since the opening of this Parliament, 84 petitions have been presented in this House, but there has not been a single response yet. Everything is there. The credibility of this provision in the Standing Orders depends in large part on the response provided. Standing Order 36(8) now

gives the government 45 calendar days to examine a petition and respond to it. The government should not evade this obligation.

Any member has the right to table a petition. This act of tabling, which is not currently open to debate on the form or content of the petition, enables the member to freely fulfil his or her responsibilities as a representative of the people without having to endorse the petitioners' claims. It would be against my principles to table a petition without endorsing it, but the Standing Orders give some flexibility to members whose top priority is to speak for the people they represent.

(1600)

Beyond the tabling as such, the possibility of debating and voting on petitions, as suggested by the Reform Party's motion, creates many difficulties. First, the main difficulty would be to decide whether we should debate all petitions. If yes, it would probably be by grouping them, but if some groupings are obvious, depending on the form and origin of the petition, others are not so obvious.

On the other hand, if we wanted to sort or select petitions to be debated and disposed of, what criteria should be used? Should there be a random draw, as provided for in Standing Order 87 regarding private members' business? Should the number of signatures be a factor? What about the purpose of the petitions? Whatever the method favoured, it is clear in my opinion that it would be criticized as a form of discrimination.

Most important today's motion would open the door to a new practice that would put into question our role as defenders of the common interests. Many governments have been accused of governing by polls. This criticism could be extended to any government or Parliament governing by petitions.

The members of this House and the political parties to which they belong have all campaigned by openly promoting various policies and solutions to solve our modern problems. Mr. Speaker, these members have been elected and their first obligation now is to do everything they can to respect their commitments.

How would they always be able to reconcile the commitments they made to get elected with the petitions giving them directions on what to do and even how to vote? If this were possible, what would prevail in case of a divergence of views? Would it be the party line? Would it be the personal beliefs of the member? Would it be the commitments made during the election campaign? Would it be the petitions, and if so based on what: their content, their volume or their origin?

We must make a distinction between our role and that which innumerable sources want us to take on. Being the elected representative of a constituency, as well as a member of a parliamentary group sharing the same political views and a member of the first deliberative assembly of the country, each

Supply

member of Parliament must face all kinds of representations and limitations.

It would be a useless constraint to add to the already existing resources in the Standing Orders of the House of Commons and allow debates on petitions. There are numerous other possibilities to review issues, including those resulting from the tabling of petitions. Indeed, petitions are sometimes grouped together in a motion, then in a bill which is reviewed by a committee before finally being passed by the House. This avenue exists, regardless of all its limitations.

In conclusion, I would appreciate it if the sponsors of the motion could answer our questions and propose some solutions to the problems which I underlined.

[*English*]

Mr. John Bryden (Hamilton—Wentworth): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the hon. member for Châteauguay on his very thoughtful comments. I share many of them. I want to share some of my concerns with him and get his response. One of my problems with the petition concept is the thought that the people who are signing the petition may be acting on the basis of bad information.

We are hearing from the Reform Party about a petition being used as a means to recall a member. My concern is about a situation in which the information being supplied to the people is incomplete and the people who are going to sign the petition are reading it in their local media. They may be signing a petition that is calling for recall when they do not have the full story.

(1605)

I will take that analogy further with due respect to Bloc members. I hope they will not feel it is partisan when I say as a former journalist I have always been concerned the information French speaking Quebecers are receiving has been coloured by French speaking media.

In that context, when a regional group is restricted in the type of information it is receiving I would question, if Quebecers were undertaking a petition of similar import to recall, whether the information they were receiving was based on only one viewpoint and whether the petition, no matter how it came out, would be valid.

I will extend that one step further and suggest that the same flaw exists in a referendum. If people who are to vote on a subject of great import like sovereignty association, the separation of the country or any kind of referendum for that matter or a referendum such that the Reform would put forward, are receiving information with only one slant, would the hon. member for Châteauguay tell me whether he feels a referendum or a petition under such circumstances would be legitimate?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Godin: Mr. Speaker, no, but I appreciate the hon. member's question. To me, a referendum and a petition are two entirely different things. We should realize that a petition more often involves a small group of constituents, unlike a referendum. For instance, the referendum on Charlottetown involved the whole country, not just a small group. At the time, millions and millions of dollars were spent, and if these people did not get the yes they wanted, it was not because people were not informed. It was simply because an attempt was made to impose a solution people did not want.

To me, there is quite a difference between a petition and a referendum, but I am afraid pressure groups are using petitions to force the government to consider their real issues, their real demands.

[*English*]

Mr. Bryden: Mr. Speaker, I say to the hon. member for Châteauguay that my analogy is a petition and a regional referendum such as there might be in Quebec where one group of people is being asked to decide on one specific issue.

I am not trying to prejudge that vote or what Quebecers should do in that instance. The nature of the question is how does the hon. member feel if the people coming to that vote, be it a regional petition or a regional referendum, have very narrow and restricted sources of information and are not getting the full story?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Godin: No, Mr. Speaker, I do not think so. I do not think people were poorly informed, because there was certainly no lack of resources during the referendum. In fact, people were so well informed that in places where there was no money, people voted not just the same. I think there is a tremendous difference. A petition is a request. Constituents ask for something, and a petition is a way to get that request to the government. In a referendum people make a decision, and the majority decides.

(1610)

Mr. François Langlois (Bellechasse): I would like to know the position of the hon. member for Châteauguay on Quebec's referendum legislation. Would he agree that this legislation, which provides for creating umbrella committees during referendums, for the yes side and the no side, and gives the same amount of money to both and prohibits corporations, unions, and other corporate entities from contributing to the campaign funds of the yes committee or the no committee, is, in a democratic society, the most sensible and practical approach we have in Quebec for settling a matter that concerns the entire population?

Supply

Mr. Godin: I think the hon. member is absolutely right. And I think that once again, Quebec, as it has done in so many other areas, has led the way in seeking truly democratic solutions.

I remember the last referendum on the Charlottetown accord, where money was being spent left, right and centre. If only, and I think the hon. member answered the question I was asked earlier, if only this policy had existed across Canada instead of letting people be inundated with all this advertising, because sometimes, getting too much information is just as bad as not getting enough. I think this policy ensures that people really get the information they need, and I am convinced this will get the desired result in Quebec.

[*English*]

Mr. Russell MacLellan (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, on reading this motion I have some difficulty with it, quite frankly. It seems we are trying to structure members of Parliament to the extent that they do not have the leeway to do the job they must do.

Petitions are a very important part of the democratic procedure. There is no question about it. They are the voice of the people through their members of Parliament. They are asking members of Parliament to put a particular point across. Through the petition they are stating how they want this advocacy in Parliament to take place.

That is fine and that is as it should be. There is time allotted in the daily procedure of the House of Commons to put forward petitions. The petitions are accepted by the House of Commons and a reply is sent to the petitioners.

If we take that further and say that instead of doing that or in addition to doing that we should take the subject matter of each petition and debate it in each session, we are in effect structuring the actual work of the House of Commons. We are dictating what the House of Commons determines as the most important subject matter with which it will deal.

That is not the actual form of democracy that most people in the country want to see in the Chamber. They want to see their concerns put forward. They are instructing members of Parliament to deal with their concerns. Through petitions they are saying they want these matters brought before the House of Commons as they are under the proper procedure dealing with petitions at the present time.

If we start getting into the question of debating each subject matter, how do we determine what subject matter we are going to debate? If we are debating all subject matters how long do we debate each point? How long do we give to each question? If we are saying we are going to choose certain areas of subject matter to debate which ones do we choose? Certainly we can pick private members' bills that are coming before the House, but

those bills are put forward by individual members of Parliament. Here we are talking about the people of Canada giving us feedback on their concerns. How can we say that some motions or some subject matter will be debated and others will not?

(1615)

I do not think this is going to work. I say to the people of Canada, through your petitions your concerns are reaching all members of the House of Commons. I also want to say there has been very good work on behalf of Canadians in getting these petitions together. A tremendous amount of work has been done in bringing these concerns to the House of Commons.

I want to deal with the point made by the member for Edmonton Southwest with respect to serial killer cards. He says that the subject matter of the petition prohibiting the importation, distribution, sale and manufacture of serial killer cards is an example of such petitions.

We have heard a good deal on this subject. There have been many petitions on this subject. I am certain the Department of Justice is studying this area very carefully in the hope of bringing forward some legislation to deal with this. However, this is not an easy subject because of the charter representation section 2 of the charter deals with freedom of speech and this is a question here. We must however deal with the concerns with respect to the importation, distribution, sale and manufacture of such materials and that is being examined now. It is offensive to think people are making money from that sort of material.

We are aware of petitions such as the ones of Mrs. Debbie Mahaffy. She was able to get together 500,000 signatures on a petition. Léna Cléroux of Rockland, Ontario presented a petition with 14,000 signatures. The hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell who spoke just a few minutes ago collected 50,000 signatures on a petition to ban serial killer board games. He has introduced a private member's bill on this subject.

The matter is being dealt with. The petitions have worked. The advocacy of the citizens of this country to their members of Parliament has worked. If this subject matter is debated again, what are we going to achieve? The government knows this is a concern. All members of the House of Commons know it is a concern. What is needed now is to ask questions from time to time during question period and before the Standing Committee on Justice as to how this matter is proceeding and how the Minister of Justice and the government are dealing with it. That is how we must deal with it.

Another matter is the Young Offenders Act. There are concerns about the Young Offenders Act. The Liberal Party recognized that during the election campaign and mentioned it in the red book. It was given a prominent place in our position paper on justice released on April 22, 1993 which indicated that changes are needed to the Young Offenders Act, that there have to be tougher sentences for violent crime and that we have to re-

cognize that there were violent offences with which we had to deal more strongly. We have to look into that whole question.

The Minister of Justice has stated he will be dealing with the recommendations of the red book and of the position paper. As a second part he has stated that the whole subject of the Young Offenders Act will be studied carefully with the full intention of bringing forward a more comprehensive bill before the House to deal with the concerns.

(1620)

Once again the concerns of the Canadians through their petitions and through their members of Parliament have been brought to the attention of the government, regardless of whether it is this government or the former one. The subject matter is being studied.

What remains is the government's determination to act upon the information and the concerns brought forward by the people of Canada. The government is doing just that. It is doing it very quickly and intensively. This is a serious question as are the serial killer cards. These two problems must be dealt with and the government is dealing with them.

There are other concerns which are not mentioned in the motion. What do we do with these? Certainly the third one is one which the member's party has taken a great interest in. That is the recall of members of Parliament. Certainly there are going to be petitions on this. There are petitions on a great many subjects, but how do we deal with those? How do we deal with a government that is mindful of that concern?

Members of the Reform Party have stated they want the capacity to be able to recall members of Parliament. The government has said it does not think that is advisable. Does anyone think that if we were to debate this question that the answer would be any different because it was the subject matter of a petition?

What has happened is that through petitions, through the advocacy of the Reform Party questions, this matter has been transposed to the consideration of the government, just as with the other two cases. However, it is different from the cases of serial board games and serial killer cards and amendments to the Young Offenders Act. The government takes those issues very seriously and recognizes the concerns of Canadians. It is going to deal with those two issues, but on the third issue the government has said no. That is it, no. The fact of the matter is that the consideration has been given.

This House has to be able to deal with the concerns of Canadians who are not sending in petitions. We have to be able to look to what we as members of Parliament envision this country is going to need and the urgent matters which come up.

Supply

We must also be able to anticipate how we as members of Parliament can make this a better country in the days ahead.

We have to have the freedom to bring forward bills and concerns which this country must have addressed. These concerns are brought forward in committees represented by all parties of the House giving them due consideration. Certainly the government has the majority to be able to finally determine what is to be brought forward and this is the way it should be. There has to be a mechanism to break a deadlock as far as this is concerned. This is why it is the government and why it was elected to govern.

I want all members to know that the concerns of Canadians are being addressed by this House. Three of the concerns which the hon. member has mentioned are being dealt with. One has already been dealt with and two are being given very important consideration.

We have a tremendous concern about the country's financial situation. With the deficit as it presently stands and the debt as it is, are we to debate that issue with equal time along with all the other subject matter because it is the subject of a petition? It takes away the scope of government and members of this House to determine what needs the most attention at any particular time.

People elect members of Parliament to do the job. If we are going to say as some members evidently are that the people do not trust their members of Parliament to make the right decisions and therefore they are going to shackle them any way they possibly can to follow a narrow structured course then we are only compounding the problem.

(1625)

The problem may be that members of Parliament and politicians are not as highly thought of as we in this House and those in other legislative bodies would like. The fact of the matter is it is up to us to change that and only through our actions can we change that. If we do not the results will be derogatory for those who do not convince the electorate that we want to change it and that we are actually moving to change it.

It really comes down to members of Parliament acting in the interests of Canadians, acting as they see fit, as they have heard their constituents telling them they should act. Members of Parliament are the voice of the people. That voice must remain with members of Parliament to do as they see fit.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member on a very fine intervention in this debate on the opposition motion. His constituents would be very proud of the way he spoke. His speech was presented in a very informed and logical fashion. That is part of what Canadians are looking for in their members. It has to do with appearance and optics.

Supply

One of the last points the member raised really goes to the heart of the issue. The hon. member said that members of Parliament should be representing the interests of Canadians. The member said Canadians. He did not say members of his own constituency. This is a very important point because we come here as members of Parliament to reflect the best interests of our constituents but in the context of Canada as a whole and of all Canadians. Some very important regional and local differences must be balances.

Thinking of the election campaign, there were 30,000 homes in my riding to be visited. I could not possibly get to all of them. There were over 67,000 voters. How could I possibly presume I would get to know them all and get to know exactly what they were thinking on every issue and be able to come here and represent that interest? I have no mechanism other than using my best efforts and presenting and availing myself to use my best judgment. That is what the Prime Minister has been saying.

I thank the member for raising the issue that we are here to represent Canadians. It is an important distinction which the opposition motion has not taken into account.

Mr. MacLellan: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his comments. It is significant that we as members of Parliament represent constituents. We are the voice of the constituents in our particular ridings. We cannot assume that anyone else is going to speak for them because we are the people they have chosen.

While there are individual concerns, Canadians from coast to coast to coast realize their individual concerns must blend with the concerns of all Canadians. The number of constituencies really develops and relates to a larger whole which is the country itself. The strength of Canada is the people of Canada acting together.

There are individual concerns and national concerns. By looking at each member for whom they have voted in this light, the people have chosen the members they feel will represent these concerns nationally and locally. The idea, of course, is when we get here we should honour the commitment and honour the reasons constituents have voted for us. We should do as they had assumed we would do and not fall back into a position of disinterest or cronyism, and continue to relate as we stated in the campaign when we looked for their votes.

(1630)

Mr. Ronald J. Duhamel (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Public Works and Government Services): Mr. Speaker, I too want to thank my colleague for reminding us all that we are here not only for our constituents but for all Canadians.

In a previous presentation some reference was made to the fact that had the party which proposed this particular debate known of the mechanisms existing so certain issues could be

brought forward, that they could represent constituents fairly, perhaps it would not have been done. It had crossed my mind as well because of the references to serial killer cards, to the Young Offenders Act, to the whole notion of recall, that the particular party may be trying to use this to its political advantage.

We know these are issues that concern Canadians. We have heard petitions on each of those issues and many more. I wonder if my colleague, who has been in the House for a number of years and who has a reputation for fairness, would care to comment on what the motivation might have been. I would be very much interested in his insights.

Mr. MacLellan: Mr. Speaker, I think this is an attempt to structure members of Parliament to the extent that there will remain a very narrow scope with which we can use our objectivity and our determination as to what we should do in this House of Commons.

What bothers me about this motion is the cynicism, that members of Parliament are not capable of determining how they should work to govern the people of Canada. The more structure in what we do, the less we are going to deviate from what they feel the people of Canada want.

What the people of Canada want is good representation, members of Parliament acting on behalf of Canadians, whether it be in their local interests or their national interests, but being objective and fair and dealing in a straightforward manner with their concerns.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilbert Fillion (Chicoutimi): Mr. Speaker, I must first thank the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice for his speech. He dealt in particular with the priority of petitions to be debated in the House, but I notice that all the motions, and the three examples given by the Reform Party, could become bills or motions discussed here in the House.

I would like the parliamentary secretary to add a little to what the previous speaker said when my colleague was questioned about referendums and petitions. I would like to know either his view as parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Justice or the distinction he makes between referendums and petitions.

Mr. MacLellan: Mr. Speaker, this is a good question, because those are two ways to obtain information from Canadians. A petition is a document provided by Canadians.

[*English*]

It is a document we receive from the people of Canada stating their concerns. A referendum is a document in which we say we are aware of a concern on a particular question and we are going to the people of Canada to tell us how they feel. The petition tells us that the people are concerned and they want us to know they

are concerned. The referendum says that they are concerned. We know of their concern. Do they think this is going to be suitable?

(1635)

Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island): Mr. Speaker, the member who just spoke indicated he feels there is no need to change to the way we presently handle petitions.

I get that message quite strongly. I wish he would confirm if it is correct. Then I would ask simply for his response to this. First of all I do not think those of us on this side are doing this for political gain. We really do want to provide the people of Canada the kind of government they are telling us they want. They want a representative, a member of Parliament who listens, hears and acts on what it hears.

The perception is that these petitions sort of hit a wall. My question is this. Should we abandon the ability of citizens to give us petitions since we can find out by other means what it is they are thinking if we are not going to use the petition method directly in making our decisions in this House.

Mr. MacLellan: Mr. Speaker, I do not feel exactly the way the hon. member does.

Petitions have a very real purpose. They make an impact in the House of Commons on all members of Parliament. We cannot help but hear the petitions read without feeling that the subject matter in the petitions is of concern to the people of Canada. We have to believe that in order to sign a petition.

The fact is that we then reply to them and tell them that we are concerned. The subject matter of two of the areas brought forward in the motion have been dealt with and are being dealt with. The serial killer cards and the Young Offenders Act are getting a great deal of consideration and work in the Department of Justice.

As I mentioned regarding the recall of members of Parliament, the Prime Minister has said this is not something we feel is justified. All three points have been considered or are being considered.

I am not saying we should not change the way we handle petitions. All I am saying is the method put forward in the motion is not the way to go. If there are other suggestions, certainly they should be considered. I do not think we should be rigid and unbending in the way we deal with the business of the House.

Ms. Margaret Bridgman (Surrey North): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak in favour of the motion. The motion itself is basically an administrative one as it requires a change to the standing orders to allow petitions to be debated in the House.

One member suggested that petitions could be presented to the House for debate through a private member's bill. We are suggesting that is one mechanism but we would like to see

Supply

petitions also have a mechanism or vehicle of their own and not be dependent on a member presenting them as a private bill.

As we know, petitions arrive and are either tabled or verbally presented to the House in a statement and then tabled for a recording procedure. From there they go to a ministry to be answered within a set period of time.

This brings a couple of general points to mind for reasons for putting petitions on the table for debate. Petitions can be seen as a symptom of a weakness or a problem in existing legislation or petition topics in many cases can involve the mandates of more than one ministry. These two points would provide good reason to debate the subject matter of petitions.

Petition topics in many cases address specific or single issues. These issues tend to be an end result or an outcome of a policy or law. It is a cause and effect kind of thing. The end result can be seen as a problem to the Canadians bringing it to our attention but it is not necessarily the main problem or the underlying cause. It is an outcome suggesting there is a weakness in the process or in the law itself. It can be seen as a symptom or a warning of a problem somewhere within the policy or the law. This concept, cause and effect, raises a few options to examine also. One could be that there is a deficiency in some aspect of the content of the legislation; another could be there is an actual omission to the content; still another could be that possibly a different set of circumstances in some areas of our country are causing different outcomes from the policy or law that are not necessarily occurring in other areas. Of course there could be a combination of the various options already mentioned.

(1640)

Considering all the possible options available to us if we do address petitions as a symptom of an underlying problem, it seems a logical step that we would present this subject matter to the House for debate in order to identify the cause and the possible solutions to resolving these associated problems.

We could treat the symptom and not worry about the cause of it, but it would eventually return either as a larger or a more serious problem or both. At some point we would have to do a full investigation and identify the cause and correct it.

The second point offering rationale for debating of petition subject matter is that of the possible involvement of more than one ministry's mandate. This is important possibly for several reasons, but the one that comes to mind first is the advancements in our knowledge base which may shed new or a different light on a policy or law than when it was originally debated.

This new information may involve mandates of ministries not previously involved in the original decision making process or possibly not involved to the degree necessary at the time. The classic example of this today would be the Department of the Environment. Its present day role in the outcome or effect of

Supply

many decisions made in the past by other ministries is quite obvious.

I submit that health care is in a similar position today. The end result or effect of many policies or laws in the past today are producing health hazards or concerns to some degree that are basically unacceptable to today's standards. The concerns about health may not be the main thrust or objective of the petition but the health care issues are usually involved to some degree, be it direct or indirect.

For example, any petition regarding the use of pesticides on crops or antibiotic drugs or other drugs used in livestock, could be sent perhaps to the ministry of agriculture but it definitely has a health care concern and that should be addressed as well.

Another example would be a factory dumping contaminated waste into a nearby lake or stream. This could be sent to either the Ministry of Industry or the Ministry of the Environment for a response. Yet again, there are great health concerns and issues apparent in this that may not have been addressed at the time of the original debate.

Also sentencing for assault has an indirect impact on health. If the sentence is reduced and that happens to be the complaint of the petition, then possibly it is because the assault rate has increased, more people are getting injured and consequently requiring treatment.

Most petitions today have some bearing on health issues. These issues need to be addressed and resolved in such a manner so that we can continue to promote a healthy environment for us to live and grow in.

Identifying and resolving health care problems found in the subject matter brought to our attention by petitions is essential if we want to help reduce our health care costs and promote good health through a wellness approach versus an illness approach. We must proact and not react to health care issue concerns regardless of how they are being brought to our attention. Petitions can be an excellent resource, especially if one views them from a feedback point of view.

(1645)

Specific issues raised in petitions may be described as isolated situations, exceptions to the rule or extremely small percentages of the whole and may not be seen as being very significant in relation to the overall effects of the law or policy. However, there are still signs and symptoms of a bigger problem if we do not do something about it. It is like a cancer. It starts out small and insignificant but slowly grows to consume the whole. At some point along the way it must be treated and the sooner it is treated the better chance we have to save the whole.

In closing, I remind us all that petitions are calling cards. They are calling us to re-examine the various past decisions and all the ramifications of them both direct and indirect in a more in-depth approach than maybe previously or in light of new information that has come up over the years.

To provide for the review or revision and updating of the various laws and policies the opportunity to debate the subject matter of petitions in the House should be available.

Mr. John Bryden (Hamilton—Wentworth): Mr. Speaker, I will thank the hon. member for Surrey North. Those were very well thought out remarks which I enjoyed very much.

I wonder if the member could help me with one aspect of this which has been touched upon by other speakers but it touches me very deeply, I have to say. She was saying that the whole thrust of this motion is for petitions to be debated.

I will give the member an example. We are talking about debating and bringing to a vote a petition, for example, on the subject matter involving prohibiting the importation, distribution, sale and manufacture of serial killer cards. My difficulty is that when one debates a motion like that and it is brought to a vote I am afraid that one may be setting the agenda of this Parliament on an important issue that is much broader than just simply saying yes or no, we agree that killer cards should be prohibited.

The issue of prohibiting something like killer cards is a freedom of speech issue. It is a very large issue. It involves wider areas. My fear is that if we do as this motion suggests will we not be setting the agenda for legislation that will require a much vaster debate?

Ms. Bridgman: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question.

I think what the member is saying is possibly what I was suggesting in my remarks. The actual topic of a petition could be seen as an outcome of a process or some such law of policy. To debate that specific topic would be a narrow point of view because it is a symptom or a sign of something major that is happening within the whole process.

I am saying that should come back to this House and we should look at this whole process and find the cause somewhere within this process that is generating that kind of result.

I would think that it would require some of our time for an extensive debate.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maurice Godin (Châteauguay): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her comments. I would like to make some very brief remarks on an example just given of a petition to recall members. I find this extremely dangerous. I agree with the hon. member opposite who just said that it would be possible for a

Supply

party to put pressure on a member who did not agree on a certain subject and force him to resign. That is the first point.

(1650)

The second point, also extremely important, would be to limit a member's foresight. In this House, around 1990, we saw five or six Conservative members leave that party to sit as independents; later, they formed the Bloc Québécois. If the members had had to be recalled by law, I think that we would have simply prevented those people from exercising their foresight, because it was not just five or six members who saw that things were no longer working; in the last election, all of Canada voted that way and eliminated the Conservatives from this House.

For these two reasons I think that it would be rather dangerous to put that position into law.

[*English*]

Ms. Bridgman: Mr. Speaker, I am not exactly sure what the question was. The member is addressing recall and the concerns that we as parliamentarians may have, seeing that as being a threat over our heads.

My response to that is I do not think we should feel limited or restricted in our actions. Possibly what we should do is take a more positive approach versus the negative and put more faith in our constituents and Canadians in assessing our position here in the House and realizing that there are times when we cannot please all the people all the time on everything. We have to have faith in the people to judge and evaluate our performance honestly.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary North): Mr. Speaker, this is a very interesting debate today which is near and dear to the hearts of Reformers.

During the election campaign just a few months ago the candidates' forums that I attended were very interesting. The Liberal candidate, a very fine individual, had a line in her speech that went over very well with the crowd until I got at it. It was: "In a few days time you people will be the boss. For those three or four minutes when you are in the ballot booth you are going to be the ones who decide what happens for this country for the next four years". That is true.

My response to that was Canadians in a democracy should be in charge a whole lot more than three or four minutes every four or five years.

This debate is important because it goes to a very fundamental, philosophical definition of democracy. It is, do what the people think and want count between elections? I would submit, and I think it is borne out by what happens in our country that right now it does not count for very much. We have heard a

number of members argue vehemently that it should not either. To me that is fundamentally wrong.

I believe that many Canadians would like to sit where we sit, would like to have the time and the opportunity to examine the issues before our country and to make decisions based on that evidence. However, not all of us as Canadians can do that, given the time and constraints of our other duties and responsibilities and perhaps other factors. Therefore, on the democratic principle of one person, one vote we elect our own representatives.

We should underline the word representative. In the past representation has been a minuscule element in what happens here in Parliament. In the past it was not what the people we represented thought that counted so much as what the party we represented thought. If that had worked well we would all be happy with it. It really has not worked well.

(1655)

When we get down to a style of representation that is dependent on what the party thinks, then it is the people who decide for the party who decide for parliamentarians and decide for the whole country. We get to the point at which a very small group of people decides everything because what it decides is supported by the other people in its party who dominate Parliament which decides things for the country.

That is really the problem we are trying to fix. If this small group of people had consistently made wise decisions, respecting our opinions, that carried the judgment of Canadians I think we would all be happy with that system. All of us have a life. We would be happy to live our lives, to pay attention to our business or professional interests or family interests and let this wise small group of people run everything, if it was doing it well. It has not.

The fact of the matter is that this group has buried us in debt. It has not listened to what we want. It has not respected our viewpoints. This has been shown over and over again in the last Parliament in which we had members of Parliament standing up and actually saying bare faced to people in public meetings: "I do not care if 90 per cent of my constituents oppose this legislation, I am supporting it because it is right for Canada".

With respect to some of our representatives in the past, it is our money that is being spent as Canadians, it is our future that is being shaped by these people who seem to know so much better than we do what is right for our country. I do not feel in a democracy it is appropriate or even acceptable for a small group of people to say it knows best for everybody.

What wisdom is invested in people simply by walking into these hallowed halls? We do not know any more than most Canadians in spite of our breadth of background and the education that most of us have. We are simply here to do a job and that job has three elements. It has an element of a mandate because we campaigned on certain things. If we campaigned to balance a budget then we had better balance the budget. If we campaigned

Supply

to listen to people and be open to people's viewpoints, then we had better follow through on that. If we campaigned on anything, then people expect us to keep those promises and they have given us a mandate to do that.

There are many things that come up in Parliament about which we have not specifically stood up in a campaign in those 50 days and said we are going to do this in this circumstance. Then we have to follow our own judgment in some cases because we cannot go back to our thousands of constituents and take a poll asking what they want us to do.

There are numerous occasions when the person elected has to use their best judgment. In that I agree with members opposite. There are also a large number of instances in which the issues are so big and so far reaching in consequence and so national in scope that it is only right and proper in a democracy that every citizen, after having an opportunity to make a full and fair examination of that issue, should be able to have input in it.

Otherwise we get into a situation we had in the Meech Lake debates and the Charlottetown accord in which a few people in this House think they know best for the country. It turns out that their wisdom, the wisdom of every single party in the House, is totally disconnected from what Canadians really want.

It is up to us as people who have been given a great deal of trust to fix that situation. In my view the way to do it is through these democratic reforms that we have been talking about. Other democracies use them. They work well. They connect what we do in this House as decision makers with the judgment of ordinary Canadians.

We have ample opportunity to use our wonderful and exalted judgment on any number of issues. We need checks and balances on that discretion, on that judgment, and that is all we are asking.

We have picked the issue of petitions to talk about today. Thousands and thousands of Canadians spend untold time, effort and trouble because they believe so strongly that something should be done and they appeal to us in a petition to do something. What happens? Things drop into the black hole. They are not debated. They are not voted on. They are rarely looked at. Many times people do not even know they were introduced because they were not introduced when the House was full. That is wrong. Canadians need to be able to feel that what they say to us counts for something. Nowhere is it more evident than in the petition making process.

(1700)

This is only one aspect of where we as parliamentarians must start recognizing that we only represent people. We must be

connected and accountable to those people whom we represent. We must truly respond to their wishes, desires and concerns.

I would submit to the House for the consideration of members that these changes are coming. I would ask that they be supported and that we work together to reconnect Canadians with the decision making process on their behalf.

Mrs. Karen Kraft Sloan (York—Simcoe): Mr. Speaker, once again members across the floor in the Reform Party have set up yet another false straw dog concerning the Canadian people.

It has been suggested that Parliament is not a democratic place. I support what the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell originally said. There exists a mechanism to deal with petitions. It is up to individual members who bring these petitions forward to ensure they do the work for their constituents and on behalf of their constituents. As the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell pointed out, where are the Reform Party members in terms of their motions regarding petitions?

I sit on this side of the House. As a brand new member I am learning a lot about the traditions of Parliament. The very first day I sat over here on orientation day was most significant. I listened to the previous speaker talk about the fine tradition of Parliament which has existed and developed over hundreds of years.

When we take a tradition like Parliament and decide to throw it on its head, upside down, we cannot control the kinds of things that might happen and the injustices to the democratic process that occur out of naivety. It is not without passion on the hon. members' part on the other side of the House, but I would suggest this is yet again a false straw dog set before the Canadian people. There exists in Parliament a mechanism to do the very things they are suggesting on the other side of the House. If they were serving their constituents well they would be doing just that.

Mrs. Ablonczy: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for her comments. With respect, however, it is an insult to Canadians to suggest that their thousands of signatures are a false straw dog. They should count for something.

Yes, members can introduce private members' bills based on petitions, but what happens to them? They go into a lottery. Quite often they are not even debated or voted on.

Yes, we can work for these things in committee. But should not petitions signed by thousands of Canadians have more significance and not just go into the mill? Should they not be treated with some sort of acknowledgement and respect by the people they are presented to?

Supply

If we go to someone with a request we expect a response. We expect them to say whether they agree or whether they will to support us. The petitions come to us as members of the House. They deserve more than just to be tucked away and perhaps to be the basis of a private member's bill or maybe raised in committee some day.

(1705)

These kinds of initiatives on the part of the citizens deserve a better response. That is what I am saying. I think Canadians would agree with that. Otherwise why would they bother wasting their time with them?

Mrs. Brenda Chamberlain (Guelph—Wellington): Mr. Speaker, I am concerned. The hon. member for Calgary North said that we do not do what people think and want during elections and asked whether what they think and what they want count. I take great exception to that. I was elected to do exactly that. Most Liberals were elected this time around because we offered a balanced perspective.

The Reform Party, as popular as it may seem to be in the western part of Canada, has not taken a great surge in the rest of Canada. As we know it is not a true party of Canada. It truly is a regional party.

Mr. White (North Vancouver): Wait until the next election.

Mrs. Chamberlain: We will see. The people have spoken very loudly and clearly on our platform. It is important for members of the Reform Party to recognize that those are the wishes of the people.

The hon. member for Calgary Southwest the other day spoke on this same point. I really feel we are elected to learn and to seek out information to which perhaps people at large do not have access. When the Reform leader spoke he said that they would educate them, that they could institute an educational process. I worry about that. I worry about an educational process that a certain party would institute to educate Canada in referendums.

I really feel strongly. The question I want to put to the member is: Does she not feel comfortable in making decisions with the information she gets from her constituents by phone, by meeting with them in public meetings, or by any of the ways that are available? Is she is not comfortable with that information—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I think the question is clear.

Mrs. Ablonczy: Mr. Speaker, it concerns me when we are talking about a fundamental issue of democratic rights and freedoms and it is turned into a sort of partisan attack. It is like saying that since a six-year old party did not sweep the country it has no legitimacy. That is not helpful.

The member says that the wishes of the people are taken into account and the fact that a government is elected is sort of a *carte blanche* for whatever it decides to do because, after all, it got the mandate. Recent history shows that is not the case. The past government was elected and put in place the GST over the violent objections of Canadians. This government recognized it to the point at which it is prepared to withdraw that tax.

The Charlottetown accord was supposedly put forward by the past government with a great mandate. That was rejected by the people. Just because a government is elected does not mean that whatever it does for the next four years somehow has legitimacy. There have to be checks and balances on the decision making process over the next four years. That is what we are saying.

Why would anybody worry about an educational process? Surely that is exactly what we need to do in the country. We need to let people know the issues, to let them know the pros and the cons of the issues so they can make judgments themselves through us as representatives on the issues of the day.

I hope the hon. member is not saying that Canadians are not capable of receiving education and making good decisions. Surely that would be undemocratic. There must be an educational process. That happened again during the Charlottetown referendum debate. In fact the educational process was very disproportionately weighted on one side of the issue, yet people still made a decision based on the evidence they had. We should not be afraid.

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Time is up.

(1710)

Hon. Roger Simmons (Burin—St. George's): Mr. Speaker, in another life I used to be a superintendent of education. I remember well—and I will document it chapter and verse—the town was Springdale on the northeast coast of Newfoundland and the issue was whether to amalgamate the school services.

As members will realize, under the Constitution, Newfoundland has a denominational system of education. At the moment in 1994 it has in effect three systems: a Roman Catholic system, a Pentecostal system and an integrated system, that being the integration of several of the religious denominations which formerly had their separate services. I am talking now about a point in time just before that integration. We had in a given community a number of individual school systems.

The proposal was that they be integrated, so somebody had a petition. On the petition in that community of 3,000, fully 85 per cent of the petitioners—I do not have the numbers but it represented the overwhelming adult population of that particular community—wanted what we called amalgamation, a bringing together of the separate services, an integration. However, within two weeks somebody else produced a petition with the overwhelming adult population having signed it in which about 58 per cent did not want the amalgamation. Clearly many of the

Supply

same names showed up on both petitions within a period of 10 or 12 days.

My point is that petitions serve a very worthwhile purpose but they can be abused. One of the reasons they can be abused is that it is difficult when a neighbour comes to the door to say no to him when all he is looking for is a signature.

Members of the House will acknowledge that very often petitions get signed without due thought. They ought not to be taken as gospel. They ought to be taken as an indicator though. If someone comes to me with a petition on a subject that states 85 per cent of the community is of this particular mind, I take that to be a very strong message.

Do members know what is even better than petitions? A ballot box because there they cannot vote both ways. There they vote one way or the other and they are obliged to stick with it.

Let us understand where I am coming from on petitions. Petitions are a very important instrument, a very important mechanism. That is why we as legislators or parliamentarians have always given petitions—and by we I mean the many people who have gone before us in this Parliament and the British Parliament—petitions a place of pre-eminence in the Chamber.

It is the grievance of the people. It is the people saying collectively that they are for something or they are against something or are concerned about a particular issue. Members of Parliament who make light of that instrument are making light of a lot of people. They are making light of an instrument that has served Parliament and the people of the country very well for a long time.

Having said that, the danger is that we make the illogical transition from petitions as a means of sending a signal, petitions as a means of recording a grievance, to government by petition.

I believe I illustrated the problem with government by petition with my example. Had we followed both petitions back then in the community of Springdale several years ago we would have had two schools. We would have had the amalgamated one because that is what 85 per cent of the people wanted. We also would have had all the separate schools because that is what 58 per cent of the people wanted within the same 10 or 12 day period.

That is the difficulty.

(1715)

That is the conundrum with petitions. Very often they would have you do things which are mutually exclusive. I put it to any member of this House that if they go out and get a petition on any issue, in the same week I will get a petition with as many names on the other side of that issue. The beauty of petitions is that they

send a signal. The weakness of petitions is that they send mixed signals.

The weakness is what happens at that door, as I mentioned a moment ago. It is difficult unless you have a very well thought out position on an issue. If you are publicly known to be, for example, against abortion it is easy to say to the individual who comes to the door: "You know my position on that and I cannot sign your petition which is for abortion". However, with the exception of three or four conscience issues such as abortion, capital punishment and euthanasia, people have to live together in small communities and when a neighbour comes to the door with that petition, often it is easier. I am not saying it is right. I am not justifying it. I am characterizing what happens thousands of times with petitions. Thousands of times people sign a petition and are known in many cases to have signed petitions on opposite sides of the issue.

That is why I started with an example, not a generalization, a specific example in which I was involved in a situation in which people within eight or ten or twelve days had signed opposite sides of two mutually exclusive petitions.

That is why it is dangerous. It is ill advised to make the jump from petitions as a form of grievance, petitions as a way of testing the water, petitions as a way of knowing what people think on an issue, to government by petitions.

Let us look at the essence of this particular motion. It says in effect that petitions are an important vehicle. It says in effect that petitions ought to have more of a role in this Chamber.

I say to my friend from Edmonton Southwest, if that is his real motivation here, and I would suspect that it is, there are ways to do that. His colleague from Calgary North dismisses the idea of private members' bills. A lot of private members bills go down the drain, a lot because they should. However, a lot of others have gone down the drain because the member did not do his or her homework. Very often if a member is seized with an issue, seized with the importance of an issue, that member can stick handle his or her way through the maze here and get a private members' bill passed in this House. I have seen it happen many times.

Before people start denigrating the private members' bill, they ought to check the record in this House and they will find that many private members' bills have made it past the post in this particular Chamber.

Mr. Young: We cannot smoke here because of a private members' bill.

Mr. Simmons: The old anti-smoking stance on the Hill right now, my colleague, the Minister of Transport, reminds us is the direct result of a private members' bill, just by way of example. There are many others we could mention.

Supply

If petitions bring to the public eye an issue which is sufficiently important and if the petitioners have a sufficiently energetic and informed member of Parliament, that issue will find its way to the floor of this House in a way that will be productive. That is my first point.

I have already stated my second point a couple of times. Let us not rush to have government by mail. If we think this through, there is no need to come here at all. We just need little buttons in 27 million homes—if you are for this, push that button; if you are against that, push that button. That is not what government is about. That is not what this House is about. This is a forum for debate. I have had members of all parties say to me since they have come here in one form or another that they did not quite realize how it was, the implications of this.

(1720)

I have had to say to myself and to others many times that is why I am here. I have not come here with a closed mind. I have not been sent here as a proxy by the people of Burin—St. George's. Twenty-five thousand people put their x after my name last fall, October 25. Many of them had done it on occasions before. They have had nine occasions to cast their votes for or against me, as the case may be. There is a method of recall. If that is the concern, then I have difficulty.

I have written down what the member for Calgary North said: "Representation has been a minuscule element here". I have to say to her that she might want to look at those words because she might have said them in the heat of debate.

What an insult.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Simmons: What was I doing when I was out beating my gums for the last aeons of years about the fishery problems on the south coast of Newfoundland? What was that?

How about the times I got up here and talked about the need for better student aid programs? How about the times I got up here and talked about some fairness, some balance in the way that we have transfer payments to the various provinces? How about the time I got up here and asked for tougher laws in terms of gun control?

Was I just pushing my own agenda at those times? Was I maybe representing somebody once in a while? Or, in her words, was it just a minuscule number of times—I was doing it by accident, I came here to push my own agenda. I do not think she believes that for a moment. I do not know her well but what I know of her tells me that she does not believe that kind of nonsense. That is absolute, unadulterated nonsense, I have to say to her.

She might want to retract it because if she does not retract it she has insulted not just me. I have had a few insults. I can take them. There are a few other members of Parliament around here.

Even if we exclude all the members of her party who have just come here, let us go back and put them in a special category that they would not dare to do anything but represent. Let us buy that line for the moment. It is the same for my friends in the Bloc who, with the exception of six or seven of them, are here for the first time. It is the same for a number on this side and those who would like to be on this side, those over in the Siberian section over there. We plan to have those numbers for a long time to come.

A lot of us have been here before and a lot of members of other parties have come here. I just had the feeling, perhaps I was completely duped by all this, when I watched them when they got up and presented petitions and raised issues that they were actually representing people. Now I have to accept that all the time they were here they were just flogging their own words, just doing their own thing.

I do not want to make light of the member's comment because she also used an example that I wanted to use so I will use it as well. She used the example of the GST in the last Parliament. There was a clear case in which despite the petitions, the objections of 85 per cent of the Canadian people, the government rammed it through. There is a case in which the system broke down. It broke down temporarily. People dealt with it in spades when the election came. The party that did that has only two members in this House right now.

The system broke down temporarily but it is basically the exception. I can give another example. Around 1983 the government of then Prime Minister Trudeau was contemplating some changes in old age pensions. Then petitions came in. Then the will of the people was heard. We very quickly abandoned any plans we had on old age pension reform at that particular time.

(1725)

We cannot have an election every day. Is four years not enough? Let us make it three years. If the time between elections is the issue, if we cannot be trusted to come down here for four years at a time, let us haul us back as they do in Congress in the United States every two years or whatever. Let us change the time period.

Let us not dupe the people into thinking that all will be happy and hunky dory if they can mail in their decision on today's problem, push the button today, send in the petition tomorrow morning.

The problem, as I illustrated in my opening example, with petitions and with the will of the people is that it is not always black and white. Sometimes 30 per cent want one thing and 35 per cent want another and the other 35 want something else. What do we do, have three policies?

We cannot beg the essential question that a government is elected to govern. If it does it in accordance with its mandate it can face the people squarely next time around. If it betrays that

Supply

mandate, we have a very recent example of what happens to that kind of a government.

There is a notion that somehow we can undermine the electorate all the time. I mentioned 25,000 voted for me, others can quote even more impressive figures. My friend from North York could tell us, I suppose, that over 100,000 people voted for him. Were all those people a bunch of dupes? Were they all absolutely stupid? Every member sitting in this House had either a majority or a plurality. They came here with the direct blessings of many thousands of people in each case.

Now I am being told today that these people did not mean that. What they would rather do instead of all those *xs* is have a lot of petitions. God bless them. Send us the petitions, lots of them. Send us all the petitions they want. If some of the people in Burin—St. George's are signing those petitions I have to say to them, each one of those 25,000 darlings who voted for me, that I will respect their petition, I will hear their grievance but I will not let it cancel out my basic mandate here which is to represent all the people of Burin—St. George's, not just the people who can hustle petitions best. That is my mandate here. That is a mandate I intend to serve to the very best of my ability.

Mr. Jack Ramsay (Crowfoot): Mr. Speaker, I certainly do not have to ask the hon. member any questions because I know where he stands. That is pretty well for the status quo.

I would like to make a couple of comments that he might want to respond to. He took exception to our member from Calgary when she indicated that she felt the representation has been minuscule. The member's former leader, Mr. Trudeau, made the statement that when backbenchers get 50 feet from the House of Commons they are nobodies.

Perhaps he could take that into consideration and perhaps he could take into consideration what the people think about that kind of representation where a small group of people within a party and within a government decides the direction that the government is going to take on important issues that impact upon individuals so severely.

I have had people say that those who oppose these populace principles of referendum, recall, citizens' initiative, the reform of the Senate, a triple-E senate, are afraid of their own people. They do not trust them. They are saying to them at election time: "Trust us with the authority you will invest in us by way of sending us to Ottawa, but we do not want to have to trust you to hold us accountable for the way that we conduct your affairs on a daily basis".

(1730)

The hon. member mentioned this whole huge mistake that the former government made with regard to the GST. Look at the damage that was done and has been done and will continue to be done. We are saying that if we had a mechanism in place through which the people could have stopped that damage, that ill-con-

ceived piece of legislation would not have been passed into legislation; and the enormous economic damage that has been done and that has been recognized by the Liberal government would not have been done. This is what we are saying. The people need these checks and balances. This is to what the member for Calgary was alluding.

We are not saying we want to run government by push buttons, as the hon. member stated. We want to place reasonable checks and balances in place whereby when the people are aroused over an issue they have some means of stopping ill-conceived legislation from coming forward that will have such a detrimental impact on their lives and the lives of their children.

Mr. Simmons: I would like to thank the hon. member for Crowfoot. He mentions the status quo. No, I am not very big on the status quo, not very big on change either. If something is worth changing, let us change it. Let us not change it for the sake of changing it.

The hon. member might be surprised to hear this, but I liked most of what he said. I thought his example of Mr. Trudeau was a bit outdated, but that is beside the point. But at the end, the member for Crowfoot particularly talks about checks and balances.

In 1992 in 52 weeks I travelled 49 times from Ottawa to Burin—St. George's. Two weekends ago I was absent from this Chamber on Friday and Monday and between Friday and Monday I flew to Newfoundland and back, which means eight hours on the plane, four hours each way. I spent 26 hours in a car, and I attended 29 meetings of fishermen's committees, town councils, et cetera.

I say to my good friend from Crowfoot there is the check and balance he is looking for. If the member stays in touch with his constituents he cannot really come back here and ignore the advice he has heard. I have to say to you, sir, as faithfully as I can that I reflect the wishes of my constituents here.

Mr. Ted White (North Vancouver): Mr. Speaker, our motion seems to have been a burr under the saddle of the members opposite today.

The hon. member decries a government by petition, as if we had proposed government by petition. Debating the occasional major petition is hardly government by petition. It is certainly sad the members opposite are afraid of reforms that would show Canadians we really care about their opinions between elections.

Would the hon. member consider a petition with one million signatures on it worth debating. I am asking the hon. member the same question I asked earlier of another member: Why is he afraid to debate a major petition? Is he afraid that in front of the television cameras his constituents will see that he does not actually represent them?

Supply

Mr. Simmons: The member for North Vancouver, as is the case most of the time, is in a fairly feisty mood. But in the process he should not attribute motives about people who are scared. The degree of scare or fear is not measured by the side of the aisle on which you sit. I sat on that side of the aisle a fair number of years as well.

(1735)

Actually I will check it out because that is the one my good friend from Kindersley—Lloydminster has as a matter of fact. His question gets lost in the rhetoric which implies that all the people over here somehow are bad guys and bad girls because they sit over here and they are all scared of everything.

No is the answer to his question. Bring in the petition with the million signatures and I will be glad to debate it any day at all. The issue I was talking about was a bit more than that. I was getting concerned because if I am hearing too much on this issue, the member for North Vancouver can correct me. I am hearing that if we had all the petitions debated here and we had referendums on what to put on our toast every morning, the world would be hunky dory. Everything would be happy, happy.

I say to him and to other members of the House that until we change the system, the government is elected to govern. When it governs badly, as the last one did, it reaps its reward during elections.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South): Mr. Speaker, let me be brief.

The question has come up whether a petition with a million signatures on it should be debated in the House. Maybe we should consider something like that. What if a petition came before the House with a million signatures saying that official bilingualism should be discontinued in Canada.

I believe there are questions the government could deal with without having to debate them. It is a matter of policy. Possibly the member could comment on this issue. If a petition comes forward for debate, if we follow what the Reform Party is suggesting, how would other members get prepared to debate that petition without themselves going back and somehow doing some sort of work to determine the position of their constituents? It is totally impractical. Maybe the member for Burin—St. George's could comment.

The Deputy Speaker: A colleague wants a quick question as well. The shorter his answer the better his chance.

Mr. Simmons: Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend from Mississauga South. The fact that it is complicated does not rule it out. Most things we do here are confusing and complicated.

If members would look at the Order Paper and the motion put down by my friend from Edmonton Southwest, the one we are

now debating, the answer to his question and the question put previously by the gentleman from North Vancouver is answered.

They are both answered in the convention we are using here right now. On opposition days, for example, even if we had a big bad government, members can put down for debate whatever they want to. I would suspect that if the Reform Party, or any other party in this Chamber, received a petition from a million people it would be awfully stupid not to make it the subject of an opposition day motion.

Mr. Benoît Serré (Timiskaming—French River): Mr. Speaker, I want to make a comment in support of what my colleague from Burin—St. George's has been saying for the past 10 or 15 minutes. Let me relate a little experience I had during the campaign.

Repeatedly the polls in my riding said that people were in favour of capital punishment by 80 or 85 per cent. Throughout the campaign I was asked about 50 times whether if I was elected to Parliament, would I support my constituents and vote according to the majority and for capital punishment. My answer was no, that I was against capital punishment on a matter of principle and I would not vote for capital punishment. I said that if they felt strongly enough about this issue, they had one choice, not to vote for me.

Lo and behold when the ballot box came in, I had 60 per cent of the votes. If my arithmetic is right, even if I had the whole 20 per cent of the people who are against capital punishment voting for me—I doubt that because a lot of them are NDP—I still had 40 per cent of the people who are for capital punishment.

I feel I have a mandate to come in the House and make my own decision and vote against capital punishment. This is real democracy.

Mr. Simmons: Mr. Speaker, my friend from Timiskaming—French River makes the very important point that if one governs and makes decisions, and if members are elected on the basis of one issue, the conundrum arises when one has, for example, a healthy majority for capital punishment in the member's riding but on another issue many of that healthy majority are on the other side, and on a third issue it is on a different side. If he pleases the 65 per cent or 85 per cent on that issue, what does he do on the next issue and the next when they are in different camps? That is why the member is elected, I submit, not so much on the basis of his positions on each of 1,015 items, but rather on the basis of his ability to make the right judgment when the time arrives.

(1740)

Mr. Elwin Hermanson (Kindersley—Lloydminster): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to address the House on the motion before us today with regard to debate of petitions.

Supply

I must confess I am a bit disappointed in the response we have had from the other side. This motion was a request asking the government to consider opening up the House for debate on major petitions. I am quite surprised that in its response it seems to be quite strongly opposed to even considering, debating or discussing what we can do to improve this important facet that Canadians have of dialoguing with us here.

I was a bit disappointed by the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands who spoke quite strongly against considering a time during the session when we could debate petitions. I was also quite saddened by the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell for his rather vociferous and fierce presentation in opposition to even considering our motion. He suggested that it was improper for Reform MPs to bring this forward for debate. I found it quite interesting that he would quote Edmund Burke, the father of Tories. It may mean that we will have to change the title of Grits to Tories in the future, but perhaps that is who they look up to and thought they would try to receive their inspiration from that source in the future.

Our motion was put forward in good faith to try to open up some dialogue on the matter of petitions. As members are no doubt aware almost daily petitions are brought to the House, certainly often at great effort on the part of Canadians who have issues they feel are important enough that they would actually petition those of us who are elected representatives to in some way deal with them.

Perhaps it is because I am new here. I know the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell said we can introduce motions through private members' bills and so on to bring those petitions to the floor, but it is a difficult and slow process. I do not think it gives proper recognition for the time and effort that many Canadians put into trying to bring the issues that are of vital importance to them to the floor of the House.

I know it is not possible to address every petition brought forward by Canadians and our motion does not purport to do that. It states that there should be a time when the House would deal with serious petitions that are brought to the House, such as the one of 2.5 million signatures brought in the other day. We have heard several separate petitions concerning serial killer cards brought from both sides of the House and there is unanimous agreement that this should be stopped. It is important that legislation be introduced and that this issue be dealt with. These are the types of things that Reform is suggesting should be debated.

I really believe the hesitance of the other side to want to do this is a lack of confidence in rank and file Canadians. Often times all rank and file Canadians see of this House is what they see on their television, usually during Question Period, which I

do not think is a totally accurate reflection, at least I hope it is not, of what goes on here.

I want to talk for just a couple of minutes about why I became involved in politics. I believe it relates to the motion before us today. As a young adult my government was a Liberal government. I felt quite alienated from that government. They introduced legislation that in no way, shape or form was beneficial to my industry, to my family or to those matters that concerned me. However, in my area almost all of the members of the House did not sit on the government side. A Liberal was a rare species in western Canada in the 1960s and the 1970s. During that period the Prime Minister told me, a farmer, that I should sell my own wheat, and he said it in rather unflattering terms. He gave me no means by which I could actually sell that wheat. Then his government introduced the national energy program which devastated an industry in my part of Canada. We are still suffering some of the results of the national energy program which so financially and economically crippled my part of the country.

(1745)

Then the insult to injury was the tax and spend of the last few years of the Liberal government before it was replaced by the Conservatives which began bringing us down the dangerous slope of increased debts by uncontrolled annual federal spending. Western Canada kept voting for the members who stayed on this side of the Chamber, whether they be Progressive Conservatives or New Democrats.

Finally, the Liberals had infuriated enough Canadians that they lost their support in Ontario and Quebec as well. Then there was a government and my member was on the government side and there was strong representation in the House from western Canada, in fact across all of Canada. There was a massive victory for the Progressive Conservative government. There were very few Liberals in the House. If ever there was a mandate to govern, the Conservatives had it. They had 208 seats if I remember correctly. However, they did not maintain any accountability to Canadians. We saw no difference in my part of Canada in the type of government we had under the new administration in comparison to what we had under the old administration.

The light began to go on in a number of our heads. We thought perhaps the people we were sending to Ottawa were not the problem. Perhaps it was the system.

The new Conservative administration followed on the same course as the Trudeau administration had. The Conservatives introduced the GST against the wishes of a majority of Canadians. They said: "We have a mandate to do this. If you do not think we have done the right thing you can talk to us about it at election time".

Supply

Adding insult to injury, the Conservatives introduced the Meech Lake accord. I might add they had the support of the Liberal and New Democratic members in this House. They said: "We speak on behalf of Canadians. You can trust our wisdom. We have thought this through very carefully. What we are doing is in the best interests of all Canadians".

Thank goodness not only Reformers but a number of Canadians have demanded more input in the decisions made in this Chamber because it is getting out of control. They have no input, no means by which to redirect the politicians, leaders or members in the House of Commons if they get going in the wrong direction.

Fortunately, the Charlottetown accord was the time for testing the wisdom of this Chamber. Remember there nearly was unanimous agreement in this Chamber in support of the Charlottetown accord. Of course the member for Beaver River vociferously opposed the accord and a few other members were also opposed to it. It turned out that this body had lost total contact with what was happening outside of this place. I have talked to people who were very much involved in the Charlottetown accord who said: "We had no idea they were supporting it. We had no idea that Canadians saw this issue so differently from what we did". They had lost touch.

Perhaps we could begin, and I emphasize begin, to turn the tables, to bring back accountability, to bring back communication between members in this House and their constituents. We start by looking at the little things we could do to keep us in touch with those who sent us here. We are not sent with a mandate to do whatever we pleased. Every time the governing party has changed it has been to kick the other guys out. When are we going to wake up and realize that? We cannot say we have a mandate to govern when Canadians are merely replacing one group of members with another because they cannot tolerate what the first group has been doing. They have lost touch with Canadians. We have to reverse our thinking.

I am disappointed that members on the opposite side who have been arguing against this motion would be satisfied with a substandard form of parliamentary government. They are prepared to bury their heads in the sand to maintain our form of government exactly as it has been for the last 127 years.

We are entering the 21st century and for the most part we are still operating in a 19th century mode. It is truly unfortunate that we do not elect members to the other place. It is unfortunate that we handle petitions merely as a formality and very seldom deal with them in the significant way they deserve because of the effort Canadians have made in bringing them to our attention.

(1750)

In closing, it all boils down to whether we as members of Parliament want to consider the importance of individual Canadians or whether we want to be merely attentive to the highly efficient lobby groups and special interest groups that are able to bend our ears. Those groups can afford to send their representatives with their glossy brochures to our offices to try to twist our arms to present their views in this Chamber.

A petition is a very inexpensive way for hard working Canadians who love their country and are concerned about a number of issues, some with which we agree and others with which we are opposed, to bring their issues before us. To just summarily dismiss them is not showing the deserved respect to the people who are responsible for our being here. They have entrusted us to make wise decisions and to keep the lines of communication open with them, so that we will act on their behalf and on their stead.

Therefore I would hardly speak for reform of this place just because it has not totally collapsed in the past. Just because it effectively serves us in some areas does not mean the status quo is what is good for us in the future.

The fact that Canadians are sweeping out one administration to replace it by another again speaks to the fact that we have to look at reform of this Chamber if we are going to give Canadians the type of government and the strength in their leaders they expect and deserve.

Mr. Morris Bodnar (Saskatoon—Dundurn): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Kindersley—Lloydminster and other members have referred to consultation and discussions with their constituents to get their thoughts and the matter of checks and balances in determining what to do throughout.

Is the hon. member suggesting a consultative process or is it a means of trying to avoid responsibility for important decisions that have to be made in this House from time to time on extremely important matters? Therefore, when the time comes they do not have to blame themselves for the decision made.

Mr. Hermanson: I thank the hon. member for his very good question which deserves a good answer.

The fact that we consult with Canadians and hear their point of view is not shirking responsibility. I am not suggesting the hon. member is saying that and I trust that he is not saying that. The fact of the matter is if we are not prepared to listen and consult with constituents we can get so far off base that they will remove us from office. In the process we not only lose our position here which really is not the important issue, but the country is led in the wrong direction and often damaging decisions are made.

Supply

For instance, our national debt which is now over \$.5 trillion, is a heritage we are giving to our children that they have had no part in making. Because we have not been listening to parents and grandparents concerned about the welfare of future generations of Canadians, we may have a very black mark in the history of this country.

Canadians are responsible. If we include them in the decision making process we might be surprised by the wisdom of their decisions. It strikes me very odd that hon. members laud their electors for their good judgment in sending them to this House. Then all of a sudden once they get here their electors have lost all that good judgment. They are not capable of making any sound decision based on the good of Canada. They are only concerned about their own narrow interest.

I do not accept that. I believe if Canadians know they would actually have some impact on the decisions made in this House we would find that the quality of those decisions, if they are provided with the necessary information would be equal or better than the quality of the decisions made by us.

(1755)

Mr. Ronald J. Duhamel (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Public Works and Government Services): Mr. Speaker, I have two questions.

I wonder if my hon. colleague would define what a major petition and a serious motion are. Those are two terms he used in his comments. Is it numbers? Is it the issue itself? Is it something else?

I am also wondering whether my hon. colleague is not being somewhat, or perhaps quite a lot, mischievous. He has turned it around to talk about consultation. Let me say that all of us consult and consult a whole lot. It may be some of us have selective understanding of what is being said but this is not a question about consulting. This is a question about petitions but he has cleverly managed to massage it and swing it around.

I want people to note the buttons he touched. The Constitution. Why? Because he knows full well that it is very delicate in the riding he represents. The national energy program was part of his remarks. What has that got to do with this particular motion?

I am wondering whether the hon. member is not being rather mischievous.

The Deputy Speaker: Before the reply, I think there is an understanding in the House that we do not impute motives to other members in the House, particularly in a new Parliament.

Mr. Hermanson: Mr. Speaker, I have no idea what the Constitution has to do with the national energy program so I will pass on that one.

We mentioned three areas where we believe that debate of petitions would be relevant in this House. The first one was based on the serial killer cards. In my short tenure in this House there have been a dozen or perhaps two dozen petitions relating to that issue certainly from all across Canada. That is definitely an important issue to Canadians because it is coming from both sides of the House and a number of fairly large petitions are being presented.

The other petition we mentioned was the one which I believe had 2.5 million signatures and speaks to the importance Canadians place on it.

The third petition we mentioned was the one tabled in the House today on recall. There were 30,000 signatures directly dealing with matters in this House and in fact with a member who sits in our midst.

These are three very good examples I would give to the hon. member as the types of petitions that may deserve some special consideration by this House at least once during a session or once a year.

I do not perceive that as being mischievous at all. I believe it is in the spirit of reform and goodwill and in consultation in respect of Canadians.

Mr. Ray Speaker (Lethbridge): Mr. Speaker, this resolution before us concerns debating petitions before this House.

We should recognize first it is a very basic principle in this institution that any means by which the ideas and the influence of the general public can enter this assembly should be welcomed. We should not try to deter it or stop it in any way, but our job as legislators or people who set the rules by which this House operates is to make sure those rules are as open and functional as possible. I say that in opening to set out a principle by which I would like to design the rest of my remarks.

Since coming to this House I have noted some very good differences from the Alberta legislative assembly in which I served.

The first is members' statements. This event does not exist in that assembly. The 15 minutes just prior to question period is the most informative part of this assembly. I hear ideas from all across this nation, from the maritimes, Ontario, Quebec, the prairies, British Columbia. They are presented in a minute and I am able to grasp very quickly a concern or a problem or an attitude in a particular region. That is significant and is a good change. I certainly commend those who were sitting in this assembly when that change to the House rules was made.

There is a second difference that I recognize as important. The moment after a person has made a presentation in debate we are allowed a period of time, either five minutes or ten minutes, during which we can question the speaker on a subject. We can ferret out more material, more attitude or more information with

Supply

regard to the respective person's presentation. It is an excellent innovation.

(1800)

That was not an innovation in the legislative assembly of Alberta. I mention those two items because I have been impressed by them. There are others in this assembly I have noted that have opened the door so the democratic process can work.

We can look at the concept of petitions and their presentation. I want to say the following about petitions. In my many years in the legislative assembly of Alberta numerous petitions came to the floor and were tabled. Often a member was committed to the petition and believed that something should happen or the petition was an added piece of information that could influence the legislative assembly. That very same thing happens in the House of Commons.

Another thing I noted, though, was that many petitions presented by members were often presented without commitment, without the objective of bringing about change or representing a group of people. They were often brought to the assembly with political expediency. They were laid upon the table. They would table them but they would run away from them. They really said to the group: "I have tabled your petition" and the people felt that maybe members represented them or maybe not. There was an expediency about it. There was not sincerity at all.

The hon. member for Burin—St. George's referenced somewhat in his remarks this afternoon that anybody would sign a petition. We could go up and down the street and anybody would sign it, no matter. We could take it to the pro side or the con side and anybody would sign it. The inference was that the petition did not have credibility.

Why is there no real credibility in petitions? Why do we look at them as documents that do not have the credibility they should have? Maybe one of the reasons, and it is not the only reason, is that we as legislators or parliamentarians have not given them the credibility they should have. People often sign a petition thinking they will just present it and nothing will happen; that it will just gather dust somewhere in the back rooms of the parliamentary system; that it will just be there and nothing will really happen; that it does not matter, nobody will ever look at the names on it anyhow.

If we were to give petitions some credibility in the House, if there were an item on the agenda so that when they were presented and, as the Reform Party is suggesting, were debated then they would have some credibility. Certainly they should have some substance so that they create a certain action or reaction as such. What about a petition, if we were to debate it or

it some special status on our orders of the day or on our agenda before us? What should it have? What are some of those criteria?

A petition would be debated. As I see it a member must be committed to or responsible for the petition. We could look at it or examine it. Maybe a certain number of members could indicate by signing some form that they are prepared to bring the petition to the floor of the House. That could be one of the criteria. It could not be a petition that is a loose cannon on the floor for which nobody is really taking responsibility.

The group that initiates the petition should have the responsibility of convincing some members of either side of the Parliament of Canada that it is a good petition and that it should be debated. They should be able to give the reasons and in turn get those respective members of Parliament to take it forward for them. That would be the first criterion.

(1805)

Second would be the numbers and the regional representation of the petition. If it were a petition to keep open the post office in a little town in my constituency, it would be a very personal kind of petition. The issue to be debated should be of some concern to the majority of constituencies across the nation, not just one constituency as such.

Those are a couple of criteria we could look at in order to bring it up on the agenda. Possibly there are others that we could design.

We have referred to other requests for parliamentary reform to come about and to be brought before this assembly. This is another item that could be referred to the procedure and House affairs committee for consideration as an innovation. It would indicate to the people of the nation that we are not just following the old rules and saying that is the way it has to be done.

We are willing to change as we have done in some excellent ways so far. We want to look at and try new things. This idea would certainly be new. I do not know of any other house that would treat petitions in the way we are suggesting here as the Reform Party. It would be very different as such.

This is where I was going to note some of my sources. The member for Kingston and the Islands informed me informally that the House received anywhere from 1,000 to 1,500 petitions each session. There is no way we are saying as the Reform Party that we should discuss all those petitions. Of course not. Most likely there are some of major significance that meet some criteria we could establish. They could be brought before us under an agenda item called petitions for debate and dealt with in that manner. I am sure that would involve more people in trying to change the laws for the betterment of our citizens.

Supply

There was some reference made in earlier comments that we could use the format of a private member's bill or of a resolution in the House. That is most likely true. That would be another way by which we as private members could get the issue on the table and debated before this assembly. I am sure we will use that format in the Parliament of Canada.

Those are two items on the agenda. What would it hurt to give some prominence on the agenda to petitions? Maybe the consequence of that would be to add a little more credibility to the concept of a petition. Before they were brought to the House they would be signed by people, knowing that they would be debated, that their names would be raised in this assembly and that change could take place. They would think ahead a little more about their responsibility before they signed the petition.

Mrs. Karen Kraft Sloan (York—Simcoe): Mr. Speaker, I am really having a great deal of difficulty here. I thought the purpose of the motion was to increase democracy in Canada, to increase the opportunity for democratic debate and to further the goals of populism.

During the election I sat with people who were soon to become members of my constituency and had different ideas for example on the abortion debate. I gave them a very strong commitment that even though my feeling was very different from theirs I would bring it forward in the House.

I have a great deal of difficulty with the suggestion that a member of Parliament should decide what petitions are coming forward. If there are only 25 people in my riding of York—Simcoe who have signed a petition, their petition is coming to the House and their issue is coming to the House.

(1810)

Mr. Speaker (Lethbridge): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for York—Simcoe has made a very emotional plea for her constituents in terms of making presentations to the House. There is no way that the Reform Party is going to interfere with the presentation of petitions in the format in which they are now presented. We can still receive 1,000 to 1,500 petitions and her constituents can be heard in this assembly.

The point we are trying to make is that some petitions need special consideration. All we are saying is let us set up a mechanism by which two, three, four, five or even ten out of 1,000 to 1,500 could find their place in major debate in the House.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South): Mr. Speaker, I heard what the Reform members have been saying. I have been sitting here for hours listening to the debate. However when I look at the Order Paper I have to ask why these particular examples are there.

The first is with respect to serial killer cards. We know they have been discussed and that there have been petitions and members' statements. Members of the Reform Party must understand that the Minister of Justice stood in the House and said that they are working on it now. They are looking at the charter provisions to make sure that legislation can come through and be effective. That is being handled as a result of the petitioning process. We do not have to debate it any more. It is a very bad example.

The second is with respect to young offenders. This government was elected and one of its main planks was to reform the Young Offenders Act. Many people brought in petitions in that regard. Is it necessary to debate in the House what the government is already committed to doing?

Mr. Speaker (Lethbridge): Mr. Speaker, the intent of the government is to make changes in terms of the killer cards and in terms of the Young Offenders Act. However, often legislation is brought in and it is senior levels of government, the consultants, the minister and the caucus of the respective minister that put the ideas together. Then they are presented on the floor of the House. Often there are major weaknesses in the legislation presented here.

My hon. colleague from Wild Rose last week made a tremendous speech with respect to the deficiencies in one piece of criminal justice legislation. A petition to the House could have added to that legislation. I think we are missing an opportunity.

The Deputy Speaker: Unfortunately my friend from Waterloo has a stopwatch and he reminds me that the time is up.

Mr. Andrew Telegdi (Waterloo): Mr. Speaker, let it not be said that there are no reformers in this place. In entering the debate I noticed the member for Lethbridge said was that we should change the way we handle petitions, that we should somehow handle them more seriously. If we were to do that the people who sign these petitions would take more care and be more serious in signing them. I did not totally follow the logic but so be it.

To some extent I too have been disappointed in the debate today. I come from a municipal background in which we actually had representatives from all the political parties. I had the good fortune to sit beside a Conservative member who was a good friend of mine. I notice that in this House they are few and far between. As a matter of fact we had more members on my municipal council of 11 than we have Conservative members in the House.

I go back to my riding and talk to them every once in a while because in some sense they have a more balanced perspective coming from right of centre. I appreciate that.

As a municipal councillor I have handled petitions on such things as people being opposed to a granny flat. Virtually 100 per cent of a neighbourhood said it did not want a granny flat

Supply

because it would start the destruction of the neighbourhood. That happened in my community.

(1815)

I took the petition seriously because the petition said that if we were to allow a granny flat, this was the thin edge of the wedge. The next thing we would have were high rises in single family neighbourhood housing.

I took the petition and went around knocking on everybody's door. I explained to them what the petition said was not correct. I explained to them that the character of their neighbourhood was going to remain the same. The fact was that virtually 100 per cent of the people in that neighbourhood signed the petition. I take every petition that I receive very seriously.

We received a petition on medium density housing, group homes and extended nursing homes. People opposed that. One would have thought the Hell's Angels motorcycle gang was going to establish a clubhouse. Instead we were talking about a nursing home where many of us, if we are fortunate enough, will go if we are around that long. We had petitions on day care, development, street pedlars, slowing down growth, reforming the Young Offenders Act, you name it, a municipal council gets it all.

In municipal politics any delegation can come forward and make a presentation to council. Therefore petitions are things I take very seriously and I believe most members in this House do.

I believe every member consults with his or her constituents on a regular basis. Somehow the suggestion that we are not to be trusted is wrong. Everybody who is in this House is concerned about serving constituents.

Let me put a petition to the House, because this is an issue that came up during the election campaign. It relates to pensions and double dipping and how I stand on this issue. I had no problem saying that I thought there needs to be pension reform. I said I would support the age of 60.

I disagreed strongly with the concept of double dipping. If I as the member wanted to get a petition ready and if I were to ask the question of whether the electorate agrees that there should be no double dipping, there would be an overwhelming number of people who would sign the petition. I would change the petition slightly, keeping in mind that we have three different levels of government, or actually four because in Ontario we have the municipal, regional, provincial and the federal government.

One of the things that the leader of the Reform Party has always said and I agree with him 100 per cent is that there is only one taxpayer. Keeping that in mind if I were to write a petition

and it asks whether you agree that double dipping should be outlawed, the answer would be an overwhelming yes.

If I worked the petition a bit differently and ask whether they believe that if somebody is collecting a pension for sitting on municipal council or in a provincial legislature and they get elected as members of Parliament, meaning that is double dipping, do they think it should be stopped? I can tell everybody just from my talking with people that the answer would again be yes. I guess in some ways I really do wish that we could try to make this House a little less partisan and try to debate the merits of legislation that come up.

The speaker from Wild Rose was referred to after speaking in this House on Friday. He got into the whole issue of crime, justice and lawlessness in this country. I found the discourse rather bothersome because the crime issue is an easy one to pick on. Interestingly enough that is one of the examples being raised here. It talks about the Young Offenders Act. It was not too long ago when the Minister of Justice rose in the House and talked about a report by a gentleman by the name of Dr. Anthony Dube. Dr. Anthony Dube is a criminologist at the University of Toronto. He knows more about the public perception of the judicial system, he knows more about the public perception as to the extent of crime in Canada than probably any other Canadian. He is an expert on those issues.

(1820)

He found that Canadians on the whole believe that they live in a much more violent society than they actually do. That is an interesting commentary. Where does that come from and what kind of implication does it have? I can tell you where it comes from. Dr. Dube outlined it. It comes from the fact that the popular media insists on feeding us a daily dose of some horrendous crime that takes place in Canada, and if nothing goes on in Canada, it will go to the United States; if nothing happens in the United States it will go to Europe, Africa, Asia, wherever it has to go.

We have news crews in this country ready to move on a second's notice, to go out to some crime scene so they can splash it all across the TV screen and the next day in the printed media with the sole purpose of somehow driving ratings. It is not hard to understand how people perceive our communities to be more violent than they really are.

When you compare us with the United States of America we are a much more peaceful society than it is. Unfortunately we are not as fortunate as Europe. This is talking in terms of hard statistics. There are places in Europe where they do not report on crime hardly at all because they do not see any socially redeeming value in it. The suggestion is there that it might be encouraging crime.

Supply

The other thing that Dr. Dube talked about was the public perception of the sentences that judges hand out. He had two groups. To one group he gave the transcripts of the trial. Those people went through the hundreds of pages of exactly what went on in the courtroom. He gave the same trial information to another group of people but it came from the media.

He found that the people who got the information by reading what went on in the courtroom would more often find that the judges were just in their sentences or maybe even too harsh and alternatives to incarceration that might have been imposed should have been considered. In the cases of people reading the media information what the study found was that the people did not believe that the judicial system was working because they believed that the judges were much too lenient. That says something and it is an important lesson for us here. It means that when we take time to study all sides of the issue the solutions might not be as simplistic as they look at first blush. That is important to note.

In terms of the Young Offenders Act, the Liberal Party is committed to dealing with it and we want all members of the House dealing with it seriously in committee. We should make the best possible changes in the legislation that we can make, keeping in mind it will never be perfect because we are living in an evolving society and the dynamics change.

On the issue of killer cards every member of the House wants to find a way of getting rid of them. There is no question about that.

As to the recall of members, I have some difficulty with it. There is the underlying premise that when the electorate made a decision on October 25, 1993 it was not an informed decision.

(1825)

I think that it was an informed decision. There is a responsibility on the part of the electorate when it does make a decision that government is going to be governing for a period of approximately four years.

It is the ultimate insult to say that the electorate, in making its decision, made a bad decision and somehow it has to be protected from the decision that it made.

We discussed petitions and how they are presented. As a new member in this House, I came to the orientation and one of the people who made a presentation to all members on petitions was the member for Beaver River. She told us how to present petitions. She is the one who made suggestions on it. I do not think she was telling us not to take these presentations seriously. I think every one of us takes these presentations seriously.

There is a fundamental premise in all of these motions and certainly references to the national energy program and going back to when the deficit started and the debt started. There is

definite politics being played there. I wish it were not so but it is certainly being done.

I will refrain in the next four years in this House from referring to the Reform Party from the west as perhaps the party of alienation, that feeds on alienation, just like the Social Credit Party did. I will refrain from saying, the explanations by the member for Beaver River notwithstanding, that it was the members of the Social Credit Party involving the father of the present leader who got rid of recall.

I do believe that issues being raised in this House for debate, issues that this Parliament does not work, are a red herring. I say that because there has been a crisis of confidence in our democratic institutions, I recognize that, but that crisis of confidence has been fed by forces within this country. I would suggest that what we collectively do in this House over the course of the next four years is really going to determine the future of Canada.

To some extent we are going to be entering some very difficult debates. I do not for a minute think that we are going to avoid dealing with the issue in Quebec. We will at some point. I think every member believes that we are going to be doing that. However, it is important that we look at the parts of this country that work well. Our democratic institutions have worked for 127 years. We have one of the best governments in this world and every one of us should recognize that. We should not be saying that somehow this country does not work or that somehow this country has broken down, because it has not.

We can certainly all work together to make it better, but one of the first things we owe this country is to believe that we can do it. That is not by destroying the very institution itself.

In terms of being accountable, governing is not easy. Any governing party is going to have problems. However, we went to the electorate on October 25 and we went with a plan. We were elected with a majority of members in this House.

As a member, I do not totally feel good about what happened to the former government in terms of the number of seats it received. Somehow I do not think that was very fair. It certainly bothers me and I would like to see if during the course of this Parliament that can be redressed. When I look at members who are classified as independents I see members who are not really full members of this House in terms of what their privileges are. If I am to believe that every constituency deserves representation, which I do because it made a choice, there is fundamental respect that we should extend to that member in terms of rights.

Mention was made of the Charlottetown accord, but nobody mentioned that our Prime Minister when he was Leader of the Opposition called for a referendum on the Charlottetown accord. The Liberal Party believes that referendums have a place. I can say that in my constituency the split was almost down the middle. About 55 per cent were for the Charlottetown accord

Supply

and 45 per cent were against it. I know that my colleague from Kitchener went the other way.

Mr. Pickard: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. My colleague can finish his speech and other members may ask questions of him.

Would it be possible to get unanimous consent to carry on until 6.40 p.m.?

The Deputy Speaker: Very well. We have no late show tonight. Members should be aware of that when deciding whether they wish to give unanimous consent to the request by the hon. member for Essex—Kent.

Is there unanimous consent to go until 6.40 p.m.?

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: I hear no, so I have to go with that. Would the member please conclude.

Mr. Telegdi: Mr. Speaker, in conclusion our Prime Minister said there should be a referendum and the party supported that. There was a referendum because pressure was put on the government. That is important to note.

In terms of concluding this debate, I can only say as the member from Waterloo and as someone who believes he is accountable to his constituents, I have absolutely no problem in terms of how we have been handling petitions and the way we can feed them into committee. Any member in this House has the ability to raise that.

Let me say that we are all small *r* reformers and certainly the rookies in this House are. The fact that some are big *r* Reformers does not give them the monopoly. I make the plea that over the course of the next four years we on all sides of this House try to be as non-partisan and unsanctimonious as possible.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: It being 6.30 p.m., it is my duty to inform the House that pursuant to Standing Order 81(19) the proceedings on the motion have expired.

[*English*]

Since there are no members available for the proceedings on the adjournment motion, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24.

(The House adjourned at 6.30 p.m.)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Monday, February 21, 1994

Prayers

The Speaker	1581
-------------------	------

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Supply

Allotted Day—Petitions

Mr. McClelland	1581
Motion	1581
Mr. Pagtakhan	1584
Mr. Mills (Broadview—Greenwood)	1585
Mr. Finlay	1586
Mr. Robichaud	1586
Miss Grey	1589
Mr. Jordan	1589
Mr. Langlois	1590
Mr. Mills (Broadview—Greenwood)	1592
Mr. White (Fraser Valley West)	1593
Mr. McTeague	1593
Mr. White (North Vancouver)	1594
Mr. Boudria	1595
Mr. Crête	1596
Mr. White (Fraser Valley West)	1596
Mr. Bernier (Gaspé)	1598
Mr. Dhaliwal	1598
Mr. Milliken	1598
Mr. Hermanson	1602
Mr. Ramsay	1603
Mr. Epp	1604
Mr. Bellemare	1605

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Acadia Centre for Small Business and Entrepreneurship

Mr. Murphy 1606

Snow Surfing World Cup

Mr. Guimond 1606

The Budget

Mr. Hart 1606

National Heritage Day

Mrs. Bakopanos 1606

Girl Guides of Canada

Mr. Cannis 1607

Kate Pace

Mr. Wood 1607

Fonds de solidarité des travailleurs

Mr. Rocheleau 1607

National Debt

Mr. Epp 1607

Bilingualism

Mr. Berger 1608

Heritage Day

Heritage Day

Mr. Pagtakhan 1608

Immigration

Forestry

Mr. Abbott 1609

Electoral Reform

Mr. Discepola	1609
---------------------	------

Canada Scholarship

Mr. Gagnon (Bonaventure—Iles-de-la-Madeleine)	1609
---	------

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

War in Bosnia

Mr. Bouchard	1609
Mr. Ouellet	1610
Mr. Bouchard	1610
Mr. Ouellet	1610
Mr. Bouchard	1610
Mr. Ouellet	1610

Native Affairs

Mr. Gauthier (Roberval)	1610
Mr. Gray	1610
Mr. Gauthier (Roberval)	1610
Mr. Gray	1610

Government Expenditures

Mr. Manning	1610
Ms. Copps	1611
Mr. Manning	1611
Ms. Copps	1611
Mr. Manning	1611
Ms. Copps	1611

Budget

Mr. Loubier	1611
Ms. Copps	1611
Mr. Loubier	1611
Ms. Copps	1611

Immigration

Mr. Hanger	1612
Ms. Clancy	1612
Mr. Hanger	1612
Ms. Clancy	1612

Income Security

Mrs. Lalonde	1612
Mr. Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre)	1612
Mrs. Lalonde	1612
Mr. Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre)	1613

Aboriginal Affairs

Ms. Meredith	1613
Mr. Irwin	1613
Ms. Meredith	1613
Mr. Irwin	1613

Federal Grants

Mr. Bachand	1613
Mr. Irwin	1613
Mr. Bachand	1614
Ms. Copps	1614

National Energy Board

Mr. Gallaway	1614
Ms. McLellan	1614

Underground Economy

Mrs. Brown (Calgary Southeast)	1614
Mr. Anderson	1614
Mrs. Brown (Calgary Southeast)	1615
Mr. Anderson	1615

Indian Affairs

Mr. Duceppe	1615
-------------------	------

Mr. Irwin	1615
Mr. Duceppe	1615
Mr. Irwin	1615

Veterans Affairs

Mr. Frazer	1615
Mr. Collenette	1615
Mr. Frazer	1615
Mr. Collenette	1615

National Arts Centre

Mrs. Tremblay (Rimouski—Témiscouata)	1615
Ms. Guarnieri	1616
Mrs. Tremblay (Rimouski—Témiscouata)	1616
Ms. Copps	1616

Mining

Mr. Serré	1616
Ms. McLellan	1616

Fisheries and Oceans

Mr. Cummins	1616
Mr. Tobin	1616
Mr. Cummins	1616
Mr. Tobin	1617

Mining Exploration

Mr. Deshaies	1617
Ms. McLellan	1617

The Budget

Mr. Mayfield	1617
Mr. Peters	1617

Fisheries

Mr. Simmons	1617
-------------------	------

Mr. Tobin	1617
-----------------	------

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Excise Tax Act

Bill C-13. Motions for introduction and first reading deemed adopted	1617
Mr. Peters	1617

Petitions

Maraloï Family

Mr. Marchand	1618
--------------------	------

Markham—Whitchurch—Stouffville

Mr. Harper (Simcoe Centre)	1618
----------------------------------	------

The Senate

Mr. Althouse	1618
--------------------	------

Rural Postal Services

Mr. Langlois	1618
--------------------	------

Ways and Means

Notice of motion

Mr. Peters	1618
------------------	------

Questions on the Order Paper

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Supply

Allotted Day—Petitions

Consideration resumed of motion	1619
Miss Grey	1619

Mr. Mills (Broadview—Greenwood)	1620
Mr. Bryden	1621
Mr. McTeague	1621
Mr. Boudria	1622
Miss Grey	1624
Mr. White (North Vancouver)	1625
Mr. Epp	1625
Mr. Godin	1625
Mr. Bryden	1627
Mr. Langlois	1627
Mr. MacLellan	1628
Mr. Szabo	1629
Mr. Duhamel	1630
Mr. Fillion	1630
Mr. Epp	1631
Ms. Bridgman	1631
Mr. Bryden	1632
Mr. Godin	1632
Mrs. Ablonczy	1633
Mrs. Kraft Sloan	1634
Mrs. Chamberlain	1635
Mr. Simmons	1635
Mr. Ramsay	1638
Mr. White (North Vancouver)	1638
Mr. Szabo	1639
Mr. Serré	1639
Mr. Hermanson	1639
Mr. Bodnar	1641
Mr. Duhamel	1642
Mr. Speaker (Lethbridge)	1642
Mrs. Kraft Sloan	1644
Mr. Szabo	1644
Mr. Telegdi	1644