



House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 133

NUMBER 035

1st SESSION

35th PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Friday, March 11, 1994

Speaker: The Honourable Gilbert Parent

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, March 11, 1994

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CUSTOMS TARIFF

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 100, I do now leave the chair for the House to go into committee of the whole.

(House in committee on Bill C-5, an act to amend the customs tariff, Mr. Kilger in the chair.)

(1005)

The Assistant Deputy Chairman: Shall clause 1 carry?

On clause 1:

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères): Mr. Chairman, I assume that at this stage we can put questions to the minister before the bill's single clause is passed. Clause-by-clause consideration should not take very long!

On second reading of Bill C-5 a few days ago, we expressed some reservations about this bill which mainly concerned two questions. Under the new GATT agreements, we will eventually have to reassess the preferential tariff for developing countries. The minister had said he intends to do this with the co-operation of the business community. The question we asked at the time, and which we are still asking, is: Does the minister intend to consult parliamentarians in any way, either in the House or at the very least in committee, either the Committee on Finance or the Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade?

[English]

Hon. Douglas Peters (Secretary of State (International Financial Institutions)): The general system provides for consultations with the business community on any issue at any time.

No changes are made in the general preferential tariffs unless there is consultation with the business community. Any time we

receive anything from a group of businessmen or an association that questions the level of the general preferential tariff it can be referred to finance officials and considered at that time.

It is more important that the business community which is affected by that be consulted than individual members of Parliament. Of course any member of Parliament can bring their concerns to the attention of the minister or the Department of Finance.

[Translation]

Mr. Bergeron: Mr. Chairman, we would like to see parliamentarians consulted about any changes in the GPT, simply because of the political overtones and possibly the political consequences that these changes might have.

The reason I mention this—in fact, the hon. member for Louis-Hébert and I both brought this up in our speeches is that today, some countries that benefit under the GPT can no longer be called developing countries, and I am thinking specifically of Singapore and South Korea. If we reassess the relevance of granting these countries GPT status, I think this might eventually have a political impact on our relations with those countries.

We also expressed the hope that respect for human rights would be a consideration in the case of certain countries benefitting under the GPT. One example is the People's Republic of China which, at 33 per cent, I think, is the main beneficiary of this general preferential tariff. My question is therefore whether we should eventually reconsider granting the GPT status to countries that openly violate human rights.

I think parliamentarians should be able to consider any reassessment of the GPT status of the countries involved.

[English]

Mr. Peters: Mr. Chairman, those were very important questions. There was first the graduation of countries from the GPT. Some countries have been graduated and I am sure the hon. member means South Korea and Singapore. They have been graduated by the Americans for example and are no longer in that group of countries. Others such as Europe and Japan have not done that to these countries.

(1010)

The question of whether these countries should be removed from this group which gets the advantage of the GPT is something we can look at at any time. If a member wishes to raise it for a particular country or if any standing committee of the

Government Orders

House decides it wants to examine any of these results that can be done at any time. It is not a closed situation at all.

The question of whether Canada should graduate the countries the hon. member mentioned is one which could be considered at any time. It is not difficult to make a change but we have to realize it has not been generally accepted to do that.

The other question was on the use of the GPT as a lever to human rights questions. That has been done on occasion. Where there is a general consensus usually through the United Nations or something similar that has happened. It is possible to do that.

With respect to China, I remind the hon. member that China is a major developing market and its record on human rights may have some questions. China is a major developing market for Canada. Canada has had a great interest in the opening up of China right from the very earliest times. We were one of the first western countries to recognize China and we have had very good relations.

It is extremely important that we retain our influence in China through the acceptance of the GPT to have the largest benefit from this. But there are a lot of other benefits on the other side as well in that Canadian companies have been opening up business there. The GPT helps Canadian companies in their general relations with China.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Philippe Paré (Louis-Hébert): Mr. Chairman, I know that through the General Preferential Tariff, Canada maintains special trade relations with some 180 countries. I would like the Minister to remind me whether all those countries are in a single category or whether there are different categories of tariffs for different countries? Based on his answer, I will have another question.

[*English*]

Mr. Peters: Mr. Chairman, there are two categories actually. The least developed countries are zero rated. These are the poorest countries in the world. Then there are those in the less developed category which are subject to the general GPT. There are two categories.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paré: Mr. Chairman, this is, in a way, a supplementary question based on the answer. On what criteria is a country selected for one category rather than the other? I am also asking this in the light of the comments by my colleague for Verchères, because in the least developed countries category, there are countries which are probably not among the least developed. So, what are the selection criteria? And would it not be better, in the

future, to have a more gradual scale instead of just two categories?

[*English*]

Mr. Peters: Mr. Chairman, it would be possible to have any number of categories. We have used the United Nations classification which is generally accepted throughout the world. There is always some question as to whether we move from one category to another but clearly the United Nations categories are pretty well accepted throughout the world. That is why we use those categories.

(1015)

Mr. Jake E. Hooppner (Lisgar—Marquette): Mr. Chairman, I would like to ask the minister whether there are any guidelines for or any monitoring done of the products brought in by these preferential tariffs to ensure that our consumers benefit from them and to ensure that they do not get lost in the retailing or the reselling after they have been imported by the importers. Could he comment on that, please?

Mr. Peters: Mr. Chairman, I do not think we could ever exactly tell where the imports go. They are generally part of the accepted items found in stores. We could turn over a plastic item in a hardware store and find it was made in China. If so, it probably came in under the GPT. We have to look at the source.

There is no way we could trace it. It is not of particular interest to trace it. It is a benefit to the Canadian consumer to have access to a particular good at that particular price, and a benefit to the country exporting it.

Mr. Hooppner: I have a supplementary question, Mr. Chairman.

The Reform Party is quite favourable to freer trade, but we have to look at our manufacturers so that there is fair competition. I feel some kind of monitoring should be going on so that our consumers do not have to pay the price and a few importers get rich by making sacrifices on these tariffs. We have to be fair in this trade if we are to have this type of trade.

Mr. Peters: Mr. Chairman, every time a question is raised by a manufacturer we look at it. We rely on Canadian manufacturers of competing products to tell us that there is a problem.

As a matter of fact we search out people concerning tariff reduction. Whenever there is a particular tariff question we refer to manufacturers. A lot of them are intermediate goods, a lot of them come in at the behest of Canadian manufacturers to make their products more acceptable at a better price for production in Canada and for export abroad. There are substantial benefits to Canadian producers and manufacturers of these goods, not just at the retail level.

Government Orders

[Translation]

Mr. Bergeron: Mr. Chairman, a few minutes ago, the minister was saying that the classification used by the federal government is based on the United Nations classification. The question I am asking myself is whether we should consider South Korea or Singapore as less developed countries or as developing countries. Of course, the answer is crystal clear and self-explanatory: Singapore and South Korea are no longer developing countries, but newly industrialized countries.

I would have two short questions for the minister concerning what he told us earlier. Does the government intend to reassess the general preferential tariffs allowed to newly industrialized countries such as Singapore or South Korea? The minister was pointing to us, rightly so, that the United States, for example, had removed the general preferential tariffs allowed to those countries, but that Japan and the European countries had not yet done so.

Does the Canadian government intend to follow the United States or the wait and see policy of Japan and Europe? I would like him to inform us on that matter.

I also have a sub-question relating to the first one. The minister is somewhat leaving up to parliamentarians and committees the initiative of asking the government to consult them. I ask the minister and the government, through him: Does the government intend to directly submit the matter to parliamentarians, through the Committee on Finance or the Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade?

(1020)

[English]

Mr. Peters: Mr. Chairman, I will answer the last question first. Any parliamentary committee can ask to have the question raised and can ask the minister to do so. At any point either the Standing Committee on Finance or any other standing committee can ask to have it referred.

The first question the hon. member asked was about reassessing the granting of the GPT to South Korea and Singapore. That is not under active consideration at the moment. Should there be some change, for example if Europe and Japan moved, I think we would bring it under active consideration.

It is not under active consideration right now to change the GPT rules for South Korea or Singapore.

[Translation]

Mr. Bergeron: Mr. Chairman, please allow me to ask my second question again. The minister has been implying since the beginning of our committee's proceedings that members of

Parliament and committees can ask to be consulted on issues like that one.

Since the beginning of the present session, the government has been saying it wants to consult members in this House or in the various committees. As they said during the pre-budget conferences, they even claim they want to consult the population. Is it the intention of the government to consult members of Parliament on graduation from the GPT by certain countries, which profit from the General Preferential Tariff, as it is their intention to consult business people?

[English]

Mr. Peters: Mr. Chairman, the level of consultation is the basis of the hon. member's question. The level of consultation is quite high on these matters at any time. We have received a number of requests from businesses to consider certain products, certain countries and things like that.

A number of parliamentarians have written to the department over the years to ask whether it would consider particular tariff items. It is quite possible. Another method would be to have the standing committee merely ask that it be considered. If the standing committee asks that question it would be considered.

The avenues of consultation are rather high on this particular item. The GPT has been in effect for 20 years, so we have had 20 years of experience with consultation and it has worked rather well over that period.

Mr. Hoepfner: Mr. Chairman, I would like to ask a question of the hon. minister. I see in my notes that on an annual basis we lose about \$156 million in preferential tariff reductions. With expanded trade as a global community, has the minister done any projections on how much of an increase it will be? We are trading more and more with these countries. Is there any way he can project what kind of an impact it would have on our economy?

The more preferential products we bring in, the more we have to consume. They also reduce the revenue side for the government. I would appreciate it if the minister would give me a bit of a guideline on that point.

(1025)

Mr. Peters: Mr. Chairman, this is a very interesting question. If we lower the tariffs on certain goods we can make a nice estimate as to how much money we will lose. However, if we had the tariffs in place we would not make money because the goods would not come in. We say we have lost \$158 million, but it is \$158 million we would not have had anyway because the goods would not come in with the ordinary tariffs.

It is a very difficult estimate to make. That is part of the key. This is a good deal for both the Canadian people and for developing countries. Developing countries have said that they

Government Orders

want trade, not aid. That was a good way of putting it. We can put forth any number as lost revenue, but it is not lost revenue. It is revenue we would not get in any case.

Making a projection into future years means, if we have higher revenue losses, that it is revenue we would not have received anyway. If we had put on the tariffs we would not get it. However it is a real benefit to Canadians and a real benefit to developing countries.

Mr. Hoepfner: Mr. Chairman, I thank the hon. minister. When I look at the trade figures we have with other countries, not just underdeveloped countries, my concern is that the Canadian government seems to have been a very poor trader. We have deficits with the majority of countries. The United States is practically the only country with which we have a trade surplus.

The government should be vigilant. We should make trade deals with these countries that benefit us to some extent. We cannot be at the short end of the stick all of the time. With the \$500 billion deficit we already have, we have to improve our trading practices to increase revenue.

I would ask the minister and the government to be very vigilant in improving our trading practices because we have to become better businessmen.

Mr. Peters: Mr. Chairman, I take that admonishment with great sincerity. We are going to be very vigilant about our trading practices. I have written on the subject of our balance of payments deficit for 10 or 20 years and have said that we should be pursuing strong trading relationships, relationships that reduce our balance of payments deficit which is running around \$25 billion a year right now. That is a high priority of this country.

I also remind the hon. member that it is two-way trade. We must remember there is only benefit to trade if it goes in both directions.

[Translation]

Mr. Paré: Mr. Chairman, I feel that up to a point this question of the GPT should be related to Canada's external policy. No doubt our policy is silent on that issue, but it seems we are facing a contradiction: When Canada takes part in bilateral aid programs with other countries, that is one country to another, we know that as it did in the past and is still doing today in some cases, Canada links such aid to the respect of human rights. With regards to the GPT, since it is also a process for helping developing countries and seeing that we are still in the same country, Canada, as far as I know, why is it that Canada's external policy does not force partner countries to respect human rights?

[English]

Mr. Peters: Mr. Chairman, the member is asking how effective trade sanctions are in approving human rights in developing

countries. The only way that trade sanctions can be effective is when they are done generally by a massive number of countries. That will have some impact.

(1030)

Canada is far too small a market for almost any country to have an impact on its own. We are really only harming ourselves if we try to do that sort of thing.

Trade sanctions, where it is possible to use them, and it has been done only very seldom, are only effective if at all effective when done in conjunction with, for example, the whole United Nations, the whole Commonwealth or something like that.

It is not really possible to have any impact on these countries with our very small market here in Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Paré: Mr. Chairman, I do understand the minister's answer. However, I would like to point out that there have been precedents when Canada took the initiative of organizing a coalition. Such was the case in South Africa, with apartheid and human rights violations. We then saw how Canada played a role in setting up a dialogue among nations and forcing many countries to take a stand, which did have an impact.

Saying that we cannot do anything because these countries are too small and we hardly trade with them is not the way to go, I think. It seems to me that Canada should play an international role there too, by bringing other nations to boycott countries which violate human rights. I think that it could be just as efficient as it was against South Africa.

[English]

Mr. Peters: Mr. Chairman, in any instance where there is a serious breach of human rights where Canada could take the lead, certainly the GPT would be part of the initiatives. It is not just those initiatives. One would want to do a whole lot of things and that is the question.

The GPT itself is not significant in the total sphere of items that one would use in foreign policy. That is clearly a foreign policy question. Canada would have to be taking a lead through the foreign policy sector through our Minister of Foreign Affairs and through a whole host of organizations like the Commonwealth, the Organization of American States or the United Nations to bring pressures on the country.

The GPT would be part of that and could very easily be part of a major change like that. Therefore I would think the hon. member is quite correct. It could be part of it but it would be a minor part of a major foreign policy initiative if that were needed in any particular case.

[Translation]

Mr. Paré: Mr. Chairman, I can see a dilemma there. I understand that it might happen that the volume of trade with these countries be relatively small. The minister seems to

Government Orders

indicate that since it only represents a minor part of international trade, one does not feel the need to intervene.

But on the other hand, it could be the opposite, as we saw in Mexico, this past winter. There were serious violations of natives' rights in Chiapas, and the Mexican army itself moved to crush their rebellion. If I am not mistaken, Canada and Mexico are trading partners, and the volume of their trade is bound to increase. And yet, Canada did not take any drastic stand, no more than it had in the other cases. Its action was limited to a few questions asked of the ambassador, which brings me to conclude that when it is not important, we do not intervene. But when trade is important, we do not intervene either.

[*English*]

Mr. Peters: Mr. Chairman, I would remind the hon. member that Mexico is now a NAFTA country and does not come under the GPT. It is under the North American Free Trade Agreement. Again let me stress that the GPT is only a minor part of our trade relationships. It is a minor part of our total foreign relationship with any country. Our foreign relationships with the developing countries are important through our CIDA grants, through our foreign missions and various groups. It is much more important to have close foreign relationships pursued there rather than through a GPT.

(1035)

Only after all those other things have been done would the GPT be included with a major change. It could very easily be included. The legislation allows the changes to be made very quickly. It would not be effective to make a GPT change alone and say that is all we are going to do. We would want to do a lot of other things with it and there would be a lot of other questions.

I would suggest to the hon. member that the GPT at this level is low on our list of things in our total foreign relationships with any of the developing countries.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bergeron: Mr. Chairman, a while ago the minister hinted that the Canadian business community had asked to be consulted on the question of the General Preferential Tariff. We are pleased to hear this and we can understand its position. The minister indicated that he was willing to go along with the request and that he would consult with the Canadian business community.

My question is the same: Does the government plan to consult with members of Parliament or will the minister, as he has been hinting since the beginning of these proceedings, let individual members of Parliament or the committee take the initiative of asking the government to consult with them? With respect to the General Preferential Tariff, does the government intend to pursue the same policies that it has been pursuing since the start

of this session? In other words, does it plan to consult, or at least make some show of consulting with, members of Parliament on this issue?

The minister also implied that, all things being equal, the General Preferential Tariff was only a very minor aspect of our foreign policy. This may be true as far as we are concerned, but it is certainly not the case for developing countries seeking at all costs markets for their products.

I would invite the minister to reflect upon this point, and I would also ask him to be sensitive to the fact that—and this has been clear from the beginning of this debate—the General Preferential Tariff can have a major influence on our international relations. That is why we are asking the government today to consult members of Parliament on this issue.

[*English*]

Mr. Peters: Mr. Chairman, I am at a loss to see what further consultation we could have. If any standing committee would like to consider this, it could do so. It is perfectly natural for a standing committee to call it. It could call this question up and consider the GPT.

As far as consulting with the business community, yes indeed we have consulted widely and continue to consult on every issue that comes up with the business community that is affected. Any member of Parliament who hears from a businessman is quite free to bring that to our attention. I hope they will. They have done so in the past.

As a minister I cannot refer it to a committee. The committee has to ask the question and any committee may do so.

(Clause agreed to.)

(1040)

(Title agreed to.)

(Bill reported.)

Hon. Douglas Peters (for the Minister of Finance) moved that the bill be concurred in at report stage.

(Motion agreed to.)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): When shall the bill be read the third time? By leave, now?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Peters (for the Minister of Finance) moved that the bill be read the third time and passed.

He said: Mr. Speaker, Bill C-5, an act to extend the general preferential tariff for another 10 years, received broad support during second reading.

This reflects, I think, a consensus within this House that Canada as a member of the international community of nations must continue to take an active role in advancing international economic development efforts.

Government Orders

I thank all hon. members for their informed commentary on this bill. As mentioned by an hon. member during second reading, although only one line in length, Bill C-5 has considerable impact through what it actually does.

To summarize, this bill will extend the tariff scheme that provides over 180 developing countries and territories with preferential access to the Canadian market. This is of direct benefit to the people of the developing world whose livelihoods are partly dependent on the performance of the often limited export sectors of their economy. Bill C-5, together with the related consultations on the structure and scope of the GPT program that this government will be undertaking over the coming months, reaffirms our commitment to encourage economic growth in the developing world.

Again I thank all hon. members for their support of this legislation.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to confirm, as we did at second reading, the support of the Bloc Québécois and Official Opposition for this bill that we consider extremely important, as it provides indirectly for development assistance and is therefore, in our opinion, a bill with a most commendable and honourable purpose.

At committee stage, the hon. member for Lisgar—Marquette expressed a number of concerns about the protection of Canadian industries, producers and businesses with regard to the application of the general preferential tariff. I think that my colleague's concerns and questions were well answered by the minister who pointed out to the hon. member for Lisgar—Marquette the benefits that can accrue to Canadian business from the general preferential tariff.

We must also bear in mind that we all stand to benefit collectively—the international community as well as Canada—from the development of developing countries and that there are only winners, no losers, with something like the general preferential tariff.

We did express a number of concerns at second reading and again in committee.

(1045)

We understand that the government is about to undertake consultations with the Canadian private sector, and we could not agree more. We encourage the government to consult Canadian businesses on the issue of the general preferential tariff. Our collective well-being is at stake, as well as that of Canadian producers and industries.

However, we consider that any change to the tariff itself or to the list of countries benefitting from this tariff would have political implications and must therefore be debated in Parliament.

We raised two glaring examples of cases where we, the Official Opposition, believe that parliamentarians should be consulted. We pointed out the case of newly industrialized countries and gave the example of Singapore and South Korea, which now benefit from the general preferential tariff. What we should be asking is whether Canada should continue to extend its general preferential tariff to those countries.

The minister made the pertinent comment that the United States has stopped extending its general preferential tariff to such countries, while Japan and Europe have not done so yet. He went on to say that the government is not really looking at this issue for the time being but that it would reconsider if Japan and Europe decided to move in that direction. This is quite surprising from a government claiming to be in favour of implementing a more independent policy.

We also looked at the case of the People's Republic of China, which is the main beneficiary of Canada's general preferential tariff, to the tune of about 40 per cent. As we know full well, China is guilty of human rights violations and we asked the following question: Should countries such as that one with very little respect for human rights continue to benefit from Canada's general preferential tariff?

The minister was a little evasive in answering these questions and we asked him to consult parliamentarians. We do not want him to wait for us to express our interest in the general preferential tariff through a parliamentary committee or through individual initiatives. We would have expected the government to take the initiative, as it has done since this session started, to consult parliamentarians on this issue with a great impact on our foreign policy.

Having said that, I reiterate our full support for this bill whose goals, as we said earlier, are quite honourable and commendable.

I thank the government for bringing this issue to the attention of the House at the very beginning of the session. I also thank the minister for answering the questions we asked him in committee of the whole. I thank all hon. members who took part in the debate; it was very interesting. As far as the committee of the whole is concerned, I must point out the work done by the interpreters, who had a difficult job to do during this rather fast-paced exchange.

I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate and thank the support staff on both sides of the House, who assisted us in our research. As the minister underlined, the research was well documented and, in this regard, I must say how much we in the Official Opposition appreciate the work done by our researcher, Hugo Séguin.

I reiterate our support for this bill and urge once again the minister to reconsider his decision not to consult parliamentarians as a matter of course and to decide instead to consult us and

Government Orders

bring to our attention any change to the tariff or to the list of beneficiary countries.

[*English*]

Mr. Jake E. Hoepfner (Lisgar—Marquette): Mr. Speaker, it has been a good experience for me to be involved with this bill, a new experience for a farmer who just knows how to turn tractor wheels instead of turning politicians.

(1050)

It has been really gratifying to see this bill go through the House in a smooth order. We have had some very good debate. We have looked at some issues. I have expressed, as my colleagues have, that there are some concerns. We believe fully that the hon. minister will take these concerns to heart and be vigilant about them.

I have followed the career of the hon. minister somewhat in his previous business experience and I always appreciated his comments. I know that he always stressed that we had to have black at the bottom instead of red. If he watches this bill as intently as he did at that time for his profession and makes sure that the majority of times the Canadian government will be in the black with these trading relationships it will be a benefit for the country.

I have faith in this hon. minister that he will do that because he is a Canadian, as we Reformers are. We have very strongly made the comments in this House that we are for free trade but that we also believe in fair trade. That is one of the stipulations that the hon. minister has to accept. We will be critical when it is not fair trade but we will support him very strongly in freer trade with these underdeveloped countries.

I really enjoyed the debate in this House. Where I have made a few mistakes I hope hon. members will forgive me and bear with me so that in the future we can operate this House and continue to make decisions that are positive for this nation as a whole because that is what we are here for.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Before going on I would like to take the occasion, following the remarks from the hon. member for Verchères in reference to the committee of the whole, which is a very important and interesting part of our legislative process, to thank the minister and all members for their co-operation.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the third time and passed.)

* * *

[*Translation*]

CANADA OIL AND GAS OPERATIONS ACT

Hon. Douglas Peters (for the Minister of Natural Resources) moved that Bill C-6, an act to amend the Canada Oil

and Gas Operations Act, the Canada Petroleum Resources Act and the National Energy Board Act and to make consequential amendments to other acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. George S. Rideout (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Natural Resources): Mr. Speaker, hon. members, I am pleased to speak before this House today during the debate on the second reading of Bill C-6, to amend the Canada Oil and Gas Operations Act, the Canada Petroleum Resources Act and the National Energy Board Act.

The purpose of this bill is to give the National Energy Board the authority to regulate oil and gas activity in those frontier areas where there are no federal-provincial management agreements.

(1055)

[*English*]

Specifically the National Energy Board will assume the technical regulatory functions associated with oil and gas drilling and production operations. This involves ensuring that the work is carried out in a way that maximizes resource conservation by ensuring good oilfield practices, protects worker safety and protects our fragile northern and coastal environments.

There are many good reasons behind the transfer of authority to the National Energy Board under this proposed legislation. Since its creation in 1981 the Canadian Oil and Gas Lands Administration, or COGLA, administered and regulated activities on frontier lands on behalf of ministers.

Canada's frontier lands, which encompass land north of 60 and the offshore, fall under federal jurisdictions. The Minister of National Resources shares the responsibility for administering these lands with the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

While COGLA served the government well, its role has changed and contracted over the years. Following the conclusion of the agreements with Nova Scotia and Newfoundland regulation of the east coast offshore was delegated to joint offshore boards. Further, it was anticipated that the federal role would continue to diminish with the signing of agreements which would transfer onshore oil and gas responsibilities to the territorial governments.

As a result COGLA was disbanded in 1991. COGLA's technical regulatory responsibilities and many of its staff were assigned to the National Energy Board in Calgary at that time. However, three years later decision making authority still rests with ministers in Ottawa who must approve even minor regulatory decisions. This is a time consuming, complicated and

S. O. 31

ineffective process. It is time to act decisively to give the NEB the authority to make decisions to do its job.

Through this bill the Government of Canada proposes to consolidate frontier oil and gas regulation. This will streamline and simplify the approval process and operational responsibilities as well. These changes represent a small but important step.

We believe that it is crucial that in an increasingly competitive world we must provide Canadians and foreign investors with a clear regulatory framework in which to operate. The federal government must demonstrate a commitment to establish a regulatory environment that minimizes the burden on those who will ultimately create the opportunities and jobs to which this government is firmly committed.

[*Translation*]

These changes are reflective of another important Government of Canada priority—to ensure that government services are delivered in a cost effective manner. We recognize that reducing the deficit and restraining government expenditure is a priority for all Canadians.

[*English*]

In times of fiscal austerity such as these governments must make every effort to look for ways to give the taxpayers of this country the best value for their money. One way to do so is to ensure that the size and the structure of our institutions reflect the level of work required of them.

This bill represents another step in the ongoing process of effectively downsizing and reorganizing government responsibilities.

In addition to savings for taxpayers, this bill should result in cost savings for energy. Through streamlining operations we will save industry time and we recognize that for industry time is money. Just as important, however, we are maintaining the quality and integrity of the regulatory process of Canada's oil and gas sectors.

I see that it is eleven o'clock. With the Chair's permission I will stop here and perhaps the House can proceed with members' statements and question period.

The Speaker: I do thank the hon. member for being so understanding.

It being eleven o'clock a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 30(5), the House will now proceed to Statements by Members, pursuant to Standing Order 31.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur (Lambton—Middlesex): Mr. Speaker, in commemoration of International Women's Week I would like to say a few words about the considerable contribution of Canadian women in the field of agriculture.

The shift in the role of rural women has been growing ever since grain and land prices collapsed in the early 1980s.

Between 1981 and 1986, while the total number of farm operators in Canada fell by 8 per cent, the number of female farm operators increased by 18 per cent.

Farm women are suddenly in startling numbers becoming co-managers with their husbands or becoming sole operators. They are proving to be very sharp in the business and marketing end of the industry, a crucial element of modern day agriculture.

I have co-managed our family farm with my husband and family for 25 years.

I would like to take this opportunity to salute the growing contributions of Canadian farm women who, in partnership or alone, have successfully adapted to the increasing complexities of the agriculture industry.

* * *

[*Translation*]

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. Roger Pomerleau (Anjou—Rivière-des-Prairies): Mr. Speaker, since the election of the Liberal government, we have kept hearing in this House and in committees that Quebecers and Canadians must tighten their belts, that governments can no longer provide families and seniors with the social security to which they are entitled.

In spite of all that, how can one explain that, since the start of the year, a worthy representative of Her Majesty used the Challenger jet twice for vacation trips to the South? How can one decently defend a bill of \$160,000 or maybe even \$700,000, as the newspapers report, to allow him and his wife to go and take a rest?

The answer is clear: it is an indefensible, immoral decision.

S. O. 31

[English]

EDUCATION

PARLIAMENTARY PUBLICATIONS

Mr. Ray Speaker (Lethbridge): Mr. Speaker, each day my office is inundated with paper, everything from copies of *Hansard* to various government publications. A large portion of this steady paper flow ends up as waste.

In 1992 the Hill produced 472 tonnes of paper waste. When I asked if there was a more efficient way of providing MPs with information, I learned that Parliamentary Publications is already working toward this goal.

It is developing a CD ROM computer system which will eventually allow MPs and their staff to access publications such as *Hansard* through their computers. This new system will not only be environmentally friendly but will also cut down on the government's printing budget. According to the House of Commons estimates for 1994-95, the new system will save the government between \$200,000 and \$300,000.

Other areas of government are also moving in this modern, cost efficient direction; Revenue Canada, for example. I would urge not only the departments but the ministers of government to take leadership and implement this important stage for others.

* * *

ALBERTA

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commend the Government of Alberta for its generous gesture to renegotiate its loan arrangements with the Government of Newfoundland in recognition of the tough times Newfoundland is experiencing as a result of the collapse of the cod fishery there.

This gesture demonstrates a generosity of spirit which has manifested the Canadian tradition of sharing, co-operating and assisting one another to make this country a better place.

That spirit has allowed us to make Canada one of the most desirable places in the world to live. This spirit of collective will and national goals is shared by Canadians in all provinces, including Quebecers, but regrettably it is not reflected in a major policy plank of the Official Opposition which pursues a policy of separation.

We should all be grateful that we have the privilege of considering that policy in a peaceful and democratic way in Ottawa, in Quebec City and in all provinces.

However, I want to suggest today that in many ways this commendable gesture by the province of Alberta is the antithesis of the separatist plank of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Ian Murray (Lanark—Carleton): Mr. Speaker, education is the cornerstone of economic development in modern societies.

To succeed in competitive world markets we must continue to invest in people. Canada spends some \$55 billion per year on education and training. The level of our investment is world class but the relevance and equality of Canadian education are being questioned.

On February 28 the Minister of Human Resources Development met with provincial ministers. The federal government supported the national agenda announced last fall by the Council of Ministers of Education in its Victoria joint declaration.

This government is working closely with the council to address issues facing Canadian education. We look forward to the council's national consultation on education scheduled for May 26 to May 29 in Montreal in which over 300 participants will represent all partners in education.

* * *

(1105)

ELECTORAL REDISTRIBUTION IN SASKATCHEWAN

Mr. Morris Bodnar (Saskatoon—Dundurn): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to address the question of electoral redistribution in Saskatchewan.

I understand redistribution is done as required by statute after each decennial census. In Saskatchewan we neither gain nor lose seats. In this time of fiscal restraint I find it difficult to understand why we need to spend millions of dollars to change ridings that are well represented by current members of Parliament.

Redistribution will not mean more effective representation in Saskatchewan.

Therefore I call upon the government to introduce legislation to forgo redistribution in Saskatchewan on this decennial census. This would save the Canadian taxpayers money and preserve the representation that they now enjoy.

* * *

[Translation]

VIA RAIL

Mr. René Canuel (Matapédia—Matane): Mr. Speaker, we learned this morning that the Minister of Transport intends to make major cuts in the subsidies to VIA Rail for the transportation of passengers. In light of the economic hardship experienced by this crown corporation, the government has decided to abandon public transportation instead of taking the necessary

S. O. 31

measures to help VIA Rail, at a time when the corporation has already begun to reduce its operating costs.

Whether it is passenger or freight transportation, the Liberal government is promoting the slow death of railway transport, particularly in eastern Quebec. The government seems quite remote from the concern of Canadians who want a public transportation system which is fair and respectful of the environment. In this difficult economic context, when employment is scarce, the Liberal government is losing interest in VIA Rail, a crown corporation which generates more than 23,000 permanent jobs.

* * *

[English]

FORESTRY

Mr. Bill Gilmour (Comox—Alberni): Mr. Speaker, in the United Kingdom, Scott Paper Limited has cancelled its pulp contract with MacMillan Bloedel. This contract was worth \$5.4 million and represents a substantial loss of Canadian export business.

This cancellation is the result of threats; threats made by Greenpeace, threats based on misinformation about B.C. forest practices.

Now is the time for Canada to address the lies being spread in Europe and the U.K. We in this House must ensure that foreign companies are not blackmailed by misinformation campaigns and if we are to live up to the promise of jobs and sustainable development action must be taken to protect Canada's number one industry.

* * *

[Translation]

LES BRAVES VOLLEYBALL TEAM

Mr. John Bryden (Hamilton—Wentworth): Mr. Speaker, I want to mention that a volleyball team from a high school in Hamilton has been selected to represent Canada at an international tournament, to be held next May, in Paris. Most of these young athletes are English speaking and come from various ethnic backgrounds. They attend the École Saint-Jean-de-Brébeuf, named after one the greatest heroes and martyrs of New France in the seventeenth century.

These young Ontarians will therefore be perfect ambassadors, since they embody the two cultures of Canada. Their team's name is "Les Braves". I invite the House to congratulate them by using a word which is the same in both languages, and that is "Bravo".

[English]

TERRORISM

Mr. David Berger (Saint-Henri—Westmount): Mr. Speaker, it is sad that as peace comes closer between Israel and the Palestinian people so does the prospect of terrorist action designed to hurt and outrage, to fuel distrust, fear and hatred.

When tragic and terrible violence occurs it is essential that we continue to support those engaged in the search for peace. I found encouraging the powerful statements by Prime Minister Rabin in the aftermath of the Hebron massacre and as well the forceful condemnation by the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee of the murderous attack on Jewish youth in New York.

It is important that members of all faiths and communities examine more carefully their own habits of thought and expression so that these cannot fuel the acts of extremists, so that they can never believe that they are merely zealots acting as true agents of God and their people.

It is such mistaken beliefs that lead to the most hateful acts.

* * *

(1110)

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION AGENCY

Mr. Jim Jordan (Leeds—Grenville): Mr. Speaker, recently the National Transportation Agency of Canada announced new regulations requiring that rail, marine and air carriers train their employees and contractors to provide suitable transportation services to persons with disabilities.

In addition, as of January 1 of this year air carriers operating domestic services with aircraft of 30 passenger seats or more are required to provide certain services if requested in advance.

I mention these improvements as the former associate critic for the disabled in the last Parliament. Physically handicapped people often have trouble finding employment and coping with situations which most of us take for granted. It is encouraging to see some of the shortcomings in our society pertaining to the handicapped being addressed.

It has been a long, difficult struggle for those affected by physical disabilities and those speaking for them. I congratulate those responsible for these new regulations.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

CANADA'S UN TROOPS

Mr. Philippe Paré (Louis-Hébert): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois, which participated actively in the debate in this House on the future of our peacekeeping operations and of our commitment in the former Yugoslavia, is pleased today to offer its sincerest congratulations to all of Canada's UN troops who are doing an outstanding job over there.

The government decided yesterday to extend the presence of our troops there for six more months. They can thus pursue their important task of helping humanitarian aid get through.

We are thinking especially of those who have just completed a quite remarkable mission in Srebrenica, most of whom are Quebecers. Like all the rest, they have contributed to our solid reputation as peacekeepers in UN missions.

Our UN troops are doing their difficult job overseas with courage and dignity and we are proud of them.

* * *

[English]

CANADIAN ATHLETES

Mr. Jack Ramsay (Crowfoot): Mr. Speaker, as a Canadian citizen I was extremely proud of the effort and showing of our athletes in Lillehammer during the Winter Olympics.

Young Canadians from coast to coast demonstrated to the world the talent and sportsmanlike conduct developed in a country that prides itself on being one of the best places in the world to live.

Whether in victory or defeat each of our athletes set an example of excellence for the next generation of athletes to follow that can only be achieved through years of hard work and dedication to become the best they can be.

I commend our gold, silver and bronze medalists. I commend all our athletes with whom we share a strong sense of achievement and patriotism.

I commend Mr. Glen Rupertus of Camrose, Alberta. This small town boy from western Canada accomplished what so many young people only dream of. He made his aspirations come true, he made it to the Olympics.

The memory of his journey, the friendships he found and the honour bestowed on him by all Canadians who witnessed his performance in the biathlon will last a lifetime.

TRAVEL BY MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

Mrs. Carolyn Parrish (Mississauga West): Mr. Speaker, I stand in the House today to describe a cost saving procedure in which most colleagues can share.

We all travel repeatedly from our ridings to Ottawa. Using a personal example, a regular economy flight from Mississauga to Ottawa is \$443.47 return. That same flight when booked from Ottawa to Mississauga with our normal weekend stay over, which includes a Saturday, is \$244.26, a difference of \$199.21.

The savings per year are well over \$10,000 per MP on one of the least expensive routes. For 295 MPs there would be a minimum savings of \$3 million per year, a possible savings of \$6 million per year.

Many of us book our travel through one agency here in Ottawa with that agency receiving a commission. With the enormous amount of travel booked by the House with MPs spending most weekends in their ridings I am severely disappointed that both airlines have not instructed our travel agent on this considerable saving.

I am also amazed that our travel agent has not instructed our staffs on the savings to Canadian taxpayers.

* * *

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Mrs. Beryl Gaffney (Nepean): Mr. Speaker, Canada's 1993 initiative at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva led to the adoption of a declaration on the elimination of violence against women.

Canada has done it again in 1994, as the United Nations General Assembly approved the Canadian initiated resolution to appoint a special rapporteur on violence against women.

(1115)

The rapporteur will report annually to the Commission on Human Rights with recommendations on how to eliminate violence against women, both at the domestic and international levels.

The appointment of this special rapporteur is indicative of Canada's strong commitment to the promotion of the rights of women, both here at home and at the international level.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[Translation]

FIGHT AGAINST POVERTY

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval): Mr. Speaker, a genuine movement is taking shape in Quebec, led by prominent citizens

Oral Questions

including academics, bishops, union leaders and business people, to take up the fight against poverty, which is affecting an increasingly larger segment of society.

Instead of proposing measures to eliminate poverty, the latest federal budget merely aggravates the problem by shifting many people who would normally have access to unemployment insurance on the welfare rolls.

Will the Prime Minister admit that Canada is getting poorer and poorer and that an increasingly large proportion of the population is suffering as a result? And could he explain what he, as the Prime Minister of Canada, intends to do to give new hope to four million people who are living below the poverty line?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the government realizes it is very important to create jobs in order to restore the dignity of Canadians.

Clearly, the current system has not managed to eliminate poverty. We want to eliminate it by trying new policies, a new approach that will create jobs and restore the dignity of Canadians. A committee of the House of Commons is examining these issues at the moment. The Minister of Human Resources Development is working on a plan to take all our social programs and focus them on job creation. As soon as people have jobs, their dignity is restored and they can get out of the poverty cycle.

That is the approach the government has decided to take, and we will keep on trying until we succeed. I hope we can count on the co-operation of the opposition parties for this new approach, because unemployment insurance and welfare are not the answer. The answer is dignity through work.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval): Mr. Speaker, does the Prime Minister realize that according to a very thorough study by the Conseil scolaire de l'île de Montréal, Quebec has the largest number of low income families of any province in Canada, in other words, 31.8 per cent of all poor families in this country, and that cutting and restructuring social programs to save money is not going to restore people's dignity and provide jobs? What does the Prime Minister of Canada intend to do to change a situation that has become very bad for families in Quebec?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I just answered the question. We have embarked on a fundamental reform of our approach to employment and social security, and that is the mandate I gave the Minister of Human Resources Development. The committee that is considering these issues is to report to the House very shortly.

We hope to table legislation before Parliament by next fall and next spring. I would urge opposition members to take part in this process. The sooner we finish, the sooner we will have reforms that will change things, because we are not satisfied with the status quo.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's answer will not satisfy families that are below the poverty line in this country. The Prime Minister is probably aware that in Canada, one child out of five is living below the poverty line.

Would he agree that considering ways to cut social programs in Canada does not constitute a comprehensive strategy to fight poverty? Would he agree that his responsibility should be to put in place a comprehensive plan with specific strategies to give new hope to people who are poor?

(1120)

[English]

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I invite the member of the opposition to participate in the work the Minister of Human Resources Development is doing at this time. There is a committee meeting on that right now. He has met with his provincial colleagues.

Everybody agrees that the status quo proposed by the Bloc Québécois is not what is needed. We need a new approach where there will be dignity through work, not through welfare and unemployment insurance payments.

We want all parties of this House to make sure that the resources of the Canadian taxpayers are used for creating jobs and giving dignity back to the workers, not having them sit home waiting for welfare and unemployment insurance benefits.

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[Translation]

OLD AGE SECURITY

Mr. Gaston Péloquin (Brome—Missisquoi): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Human Resources Development.

After the Minister of Human Resources Development made his controversial statement calling for Canadians to choose between old age pensions and youth training programs, the Prime Minister intervened to allay the fears raised by this statement. The Prime Minister said that the government had no intention of touching old age pensions.

Now that the Prime Minister has contradicted him, can the Minister of Human Resources Development confirm that the white paper he will table in June will not propose any changes to the old age security program?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification): Mr. Speaker, first of all, the hon. member's question is inaccurate. I never said there had to be a choice between seniors and young people. It is not what I said, it is what the hon. members opposite said.

Oral Questions

I said that we had to find ways to create jobs for all Canadians and that we will have to review benefit programs and develop a system for investing these funds, which could be used for development and job creation. It is an issue to be examined by all Canadians. It is not a question of pitting seniors against young people but of co-operating for the benefit of all of Canada.

Mr. Gaston Péloquin (Brome—Missisquoi): Mr. Speaker, is the minister willing to apologize to seniors he upset with his controversial statement, forcing the Prime Minister to contradict him?

[English]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification): Mr. Speaker, the only people who caused a problem and concern among seniors were the members opposite who raised false fears. They were responsible for that. They were aided by some of their journalist friends who did not look at what the question was doing. If there is to be an apology it should be from those who are out to create false fears and false suspicions.

This government is trying to take an honest look at some of the tough realities facing this country, particularly the problems down the road for our social security system which the Liberals built.

We are responsible for putting in place over the years an effective social security system for older persons. We want to make sure that is maintained and preserved. To do that we must find ways of financing it. We must find a way of ensuring that the large change in the seniors population which will almost double in the next two decades can be accommodated.

Those are honest, realistic questions. It is not helped by members opposite trying to raise false fears which they have been doing and creating a crisis only in their own minds.

* * *

(1125)

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs.

Several days ago the minister of Indian affairs announced that the government was formally proceeding to establish a new order of aboriginal self-government starting in Manitoba. The government has yet to provide this House with a clear definition of this new order of government.

Recognizing the minister's long experience in the field of intergovernmental relations, how is the federal government

defining aboriginal self-government in the case of Manitoba's aboriginals? What will be the relationship of that new order of government to the Government of Canada?

Hon. Marcel Massé (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister responsible for Public Service Renewal): Mr. Speaker, these extremely important questions require complex answers. It would be better if the questions could be deferred until the minister of Indian affairs can be here to answer them.

Mr. Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest): Mr. Speaker, if the government committed itself to establishing a new order of government in Manitoba surely this question must have been discussed at cabinet. Surely no cabinet minister would have committed to this concept without having a clear definition in law and legislation of what this concept is.

We got nowhere asking this question of the minister of Indian affairs. I thought perhaps we would with the intergovernmental affairs minister. Perhaps I can direct this question to whoever on the other side understands what the meaning of aboriginal self-government is with respect to Manitoba. Could we be given that definition?

Hon. Marcel Massé (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister responsible for Public Service Renewal): Mr. Speaker, the concept of self-government in Indian affairs is one which was used in the red book. It is not a concept that is fully defined. The concept will have to be defined as it is put into place over time. There is no doubt that federal-provincial co-operation will be necessary. As this slowly develops we will give all the details to hon. members.

Mr. Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest): Mr. Speaker, I am sure all ministers will agree that in a democratic country no new order of government should be established without the consent of the governed.

Will the federal government be conducting a formal referendum among the aboriginal people of Manitoba to secure their approval of this new order of government?

Hon. Marcel Massé (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister responsible for Public Service Renewal): Mr. Speaker, it is quite important that the concept be discussed among the aboriginal people and discussed by the various stakeholders in the country, including federal and provincial governments and the aboriginal people.

We cannot of course define the content of the concept until it has been negotiated with the various parties. This is what we will do over the next few years, I hope with the co-operation of the opposition parties.

*Oral Questions**[Translation]***COLLÈGE MILITAIRE ROYAL DE SAINT-JEAN**

Mr. Gaston Leroux (Richmond—Wolfe): Mr. Speaker, while the people of Saint-Jean mobilize every day to express their concern about the closing of the Royal Military College in Saint-Jean, the only French language institution of its kind in the country, the minister stubbornly persists in his decision to close it.

Can the minister of defence confirm to us that his government has reached an agreement with the Government of Quebec and that the announcement of this agreement has been deliberately delayed until the closing speech of the Quebec Liberal Party convention on Sunday afternoon?

[English]

Hon. David Michael Collette (Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I do not know where the hon. members across the way get their wild ideas from. They are making up the most outrageous assertions and the answer is absolutely no.

[Translation]

Mr. Gaston Leroux (Richmond—Wolfe): Mr. Speaker, does the minister realize that for some savings which he himself is unable to demonstrate, the Liberal Government of Canada is killing the only French language military training institution in America and sending a very negative message about the place of francophones in the armed forces and their future there? Does he realize that?

[English]

Hon. David Michael Collette (Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs): Mr. Speaker, this question has been repeatedly asked in another forum over the last few weeks. Responses have been given by the Prime Minister and me.

(1130)

I said on a couple of occasions this week that with respect to the financial details surrounding the closure of Collège Militaire Royal de Saint-Jean, we will discuss it at the committee, which is the appropriate place, on Tuesday morning when all the estimates are there.

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ALAN EAGLESON

Mr. Ian McClelland (Edmonton Southwest): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Solicitor General and involves the notion that all citizens must be equal before the law.

As the minister is aware, Mr. Alan Eagleson, a Canadian closely identified with professional hockey in Canada, is under indictment in the United States for 32 counts of racketeering, fraud, embezzlement, kickbacks and obstruction of justice. Many of these alleged activities took place in Canada.

It is reported that information concerning Mr. Eagleson's activities has been supplied to Canadian law enforcement and professional organizations.

Will the minister tell this House if the Government of Canada is currently conducting an investigation into the activities of Mr. Eagleson in Canada?

Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Solicitor General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, the RCMP has been assisting the FBI in its investigations. Furthermore, investigations are going on into similar allegations in Canada. Under the circumstances, I am sure the hon. member will agree it would not be appropriate for me to comment further.

Mr. Ian McClelland (Edmonton Southwest): Mr. Speaker, this information was made available to Canadian law officials almost four years ago. The same information brought to the attention of American officials two years ago resulted in an immediate investigation in the laying of charges.

As Mr. Eagleson's activities were conducted on both sides of the border and Mr. Eagleson had a role in Hockey Canada, an organization created by this Parliament, can the Solicitor General explain why the Canadian government has been so slow in acting in this case?

Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Solicitor General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, I have only had this particular job for the past approximately four months but it seems to me that in light of the complexities of this matter, it is not unreasonable to assume that investigations take some time.

I repeat, under the circumstances I hope the hon. member will agree in terms of fairness to all concerned that it would not be appropriate for me to comment further.

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*[Translation]***PUBLIC FINANCES**

Mr. René Laurin (Joliette): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance.

The federal budget does not appear capable of putting our public finances in order, considering that it foresees a record-high deficit of nearly \$40 billion, does not address the numerous instances of squandering brought to light by the Auditor General and rests on unrealistic revenue assumptions.

Oral Questions

In the meantime, the pitiful state of our public finances requires an additional risk premium to be paid on interest rates, a premium which could cost the federal government as much as \$5 billion a year.

Does the minister not realize that his lack of credibility with the international markets in the fight to curb the deficit is the direct cause of this \$5 billion surcharge in interest costs to the Canadian taxpayers?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec): Mr. Speaker, I find it somewhat ironic that the hon. member would ask me a question about deficit reduction when his leader, deputy leader and colleagues keep telling us not to cut back and deal with the deficit.

With respect to the deficit, we are clearly on the way to reducing it to 3 per cent of the gross domestic product within three years. And once this target is achieved, Canada will be in this good a position for the first time in 15 years. This should be applauded, and you are right to do so, Prime Minister.

I am not done, Mr. Speaker.

Having said this, as for our revenue projections, the vast majority of economists agree that for once, Canada has a realistic budget in terms of revenue, inflation and interest rates.

(1135)

Mr. René Laurin (Joliette): Mr. Speaker, the minister is having a very hard time answering my question. Let me ask him another.

Does the minister recognize that the additional cost of the risk premium on interest rates equals the cuts and sacrifices imposed on the unemployed and the poor?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec): Mr. Speaker, if by comparison with other countries, there is a premium on our interest rates, it must be pointed out that rates are the lowest they have been in the last decade, and this has been the case ever since we took office.

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[English]

MILITARY COLLEGES

Mr. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Prime Minister.

On Monday, in response to a question from a member of the Bloc Québécois, the Prime Minister said he is ready to help Quebec maintain Collège Militaire Royal de Saint-Jean as an institution of higher learning following closure of the military college.

Is the Prime Minister willing to make the same commitment in this House today to the people of British Columbia with respect to the future of Royal Roads Military College?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the answer is yes.

Mr. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca): Mr. Speaker, I thank the Prime Minister for his candid answer.

My supplementary question concerns the MICMIC report which was a cost benefit analysis that was done on the military colleges and completed in May 1993. It was commissioned by the federal government.

It has as its primary recommendation that all military colleges be kept open. The previous government kept this report hidden and this government has kept this report hidden. Can the Prime Minister tell us why the report has continued to be kept hidden?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I think we have tonnes of reports on that.

In the United States there are two million soldiers in the armed forces and there are three colleges. In Canada we have 65,000 people in the armed forces. We cannot keep three colleges. For a party that is always complaining that we are spending too much, that we took the political flack to do the right thing, rather than giving us a problem with that the member should get up and applaud our good judgment to reduce expenditures.

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[Translation]

INFORMATION HIGHWAY

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga—Maisonneuve): Mr. Speaker, on February 4 last, I asked the Minister of Industry to tell us what his specific plans were with respect to the information highway. At the time, the minister answered rather vaguely that he was planning to set up an advisory council. I was concerned by this because we already had the Ostry report which provided details about the information highway to the government.

Can the minister now inform the House of the mandate, composition and work schedule of this council?

Hon. John Manley (Minister of Industry): Mr. Speaker, the Secretary of State for Science, Research and Development, Mr. Gerrard, gave a speech in Toronto several weeks ago in which he clarified our interests in the information highway project. I believe that I will be in a position next week to provide the hon. member with the information he is requesting.

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga—Maisonneuve): Then I guess I jumped the gun with my question, Mr. Speaker. How does the minister intend to involve the provinces, particularly Quebec, the cradle of la Francophonie, in the charting of the

Oral Questions

information highway? I would appreciate an answer to this question today.

Hon. John Manley (Minister of Industry): Mr. Speaker, we have Quebec's interests very much at heart. In fact, last week I met with Mr. Chagnon from Vidéotron, a company that has already unveiled a project to provide service to consumers in the Chicoutimi region. The interests of all provinces are important to this information highway project.

[English]

This is one of the means of bringing the new economy into reality in Canada in the very near future.

* * *

(1140)

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Murray Calder (Wellington—Grey—Dufferin—Simcoe): Mr. Speaker, my question is addressed to the Minister of Finance.

The constituents in my riding of Wellington—Grey—Dufferin—Simcoe are particularly concerned about Canada's unemployment picture. Both before and after the budget they told me that their principal concern is seeing their family members, friends and neighbours find jobs in this tough economy.

I understand that there may be some improvement in this area. Can the minister comment on this important issue of job creation and how we are progressing since this government came to power?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member on his question. I must say that I am delighted to respond.

I am very, very much encouraged by February's strong jump in employment, particularly so since it has occurred in all regions of the country. Nationally, there is a net gain of 66,000 jobs; 11,000 jobs in the member's home province.

What is also very important to understand, Mr. Speaker—and I know that you are hanging on every word—is that there are particularly strong gains in manufacturing in the retailing sector. Some may have noticed that was something that was very worrisome in the month of January.

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KEMANO PROJECT

Mr. Dick Harris (Prince George—Bulkley Valley): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the hon. Minister of Fisheries and

Oceans who as previously demonstrated speaks officially for the government on the Kemano completion project.

In a letter to Chief Marvin Charlie of the Cheslatta band dated February 22, 1994, the minister clearly stated that only native groups would be considered eligible to receive federal intervenor funding required to participate effectively in the Kemano completion project.

Is it the decision of the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, and indeed the decision of this government, that native concerns carry far more legitimacy than non-native concerns in regard to Kemano and therefore natives should be the only groups entitled to federal intervenor funding?

Hon. Brian Tobin (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): No, Mr. Speaker, it is not the view of the Government of Canada that one group or another in society has a greater right to be heard in the course of hearings of the British Columbia Utilities Commission.

What I have stated in my correspondence, as referred to by the member in asking his question, is that the Government of Canada has provided some assistance for aboriginal groups to participate on an intervenor basis. Clearly and I think the member would agree, certainly I hope his party would agree, there is at least the proposition to be put that aboriginal communities and aboriginal peoples have been first impacted by the consequences of the project in question. Therefore it is necessary to ensure that aboriginal people have the means to participate in the hearing process should they so decide.

To my knowledge, no such formal decision has been reached one way or another to this point in time with respect to their intervenor status.

Mr. Dick Harris (Prince George—Bulkley Valley): I appreciate the minister's comments.

I would like to ask this of the minister: If no group is more important than any other in the eyes of the government, will the minister then commit to this House and to the thousands of people living in British Columbia who are concerned about this project a process through which all interested parties may proceed in order to receive federal intervenor funding?

Hon. Brian Tobin (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): I have to say that I find it incredible that the Reform Party stands in the House almost daily under the guise of question period and demands of this government far deeper cuts, cuts in the range of billions of dollars. Nothing is sacred, not senior citizen pensions, not medicare, not welfare, but in the next breath the same party can stand and demand that all groups and all individuals, all the thousands of applications for intervenor status, ought to be met with a yes from the government.

Oral Questions

(1145)

There is not a bottomless pit of money. We are going to act responsibly. We are going to see that those who have the greatest need are served in providing intervenor funding. The member should get his priorities straight.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

* * *

[Translation]

VIA RAIL

Mr. Maurice Bernier (Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead): Mr. Speaker, this morning we learned that the Liberal government is about to once again cut VIA Rail's budget. The Minister of Transport went so far as to say that the dream of a major intercontinental carrier is a thing of the past, when he announced yesterday that VIA Rail services would again be reduced.

How can the Minister of Transport explain this latest about-face by the Liberals, considering that they opposed every cut made to VIA Rail's budget by the previous Conservative government?

Hon. Douglas Young (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, first I want to clarify a point: I am sure that the hon. member was not implying that I had personally reacted in that fashion to previous cuts affecting VIA Rail, because it would not be true.

As for the future of that crown corporation, cuts will continue to be made, as has been the case for the last few years. This year, Canadian taxpayers are contributing more than \$300 million to VIA Rail's operations, a situation which simply cannot go on. We will do our best, and in fact we have asked VIA Rail to look at every possible option, including reducing its operations. Staff cutbacks have already been made and, as I said here yesterday in my speech, there is no doubt in my mind that other cuts will be made.

The national situation in the transport sector is clear. We have to integrate every system and transportation mode to create an efficient and integrated system and, more important, one which we can afford.

Mr. Maurice Bernier (Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead): Mr. Speaker, does the minister agree that successive cuts to VIA Rail's budget mean a slow death for this crown corporation, as well as the loss of more than 23,000 permanent jobs in Canada and in Quebec?

[English]

Hon. Douglas Young (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, there is no question that no one takes any pleasure, especially as an Atlantic Canadian, in seeing further reductions in the services of VIA Rail. No longer is there any service of any kind in

the railroad sector in Newfoundland. There is no railroad activity in Prince Edward Island. Other parts of the country are deeply affected by the need to rationalize transportation services.

As we go through this process of developing an integrated, affordable national transportation system, undoubtedly there will be some major problems for employees and for users. We are trying to do the very best we can with the limited resources at hand, particularly taking into account the already tremendous burden on the Canadian taxpayer.

* * *

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE COMMISSION

Mr. Jim Gouk (Kootenay West—Revelstoke): Mr. Speaker, the board of referees of the Unemployment Insurance Commission in my riding has now ceased to function due to a shortage of members. For over two months my office has attempted contact with the office of the Minister of Human Resources Development regarding this matter but there has been no response.

My question is for the Minister of Human Resource Development. Will he state when these important positions will be filled and what process will be used to ensure that the appointments will be based on merit and not on patronage?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification): Mr. Speaker, I apologize to the hon. member if he has been unable to get a response; I will certainly look into it. We will look very quickly into the situation in his riding.

As appointments come due we are filling the chairmen positions of different UI boards of referees across the country. We are proceeding as quickly as we can. It is a complicated process, as the member knows, because each person who is recommended must have certain checks done in terms of background, appropriateness for the job, and so on. It does take a little time to register each appointment.

(1150)

I will certainly look into the situation in the member's riding. If he gives me the information on it we will have action for him very quickly.

Mr. Jim Gouk (Kootenay West—Revelstoke): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question on this matter for the Minister of Human Resources Development.

The assistant campaign manager of the unsuccessful Liberal candidate in my riding is stating that he is being appointed to the board of referees in that riding. Is this individual telling the truth?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification): Mr. Speaker, first, I am not sure who the assistant campaign manager was in that particular riding. Second, I do not

Oral Questions

know whether in fact that person has been recommended for that very important position by his or her peers in the riding.

As I said earlier, if the member wants to give me information I would be more than happy to look into it. I can give the member the assurance that regardless of one's political background or affiliation our interest is in getting the best person for the job.

* * *

SEALING

Mrs. Jean Payne (St. John's West): Mr. Speaker, recently we have heard through the media and in the House some reports that the government is promoting a contract which allows for the harvesting and sale of seals.

Would the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans please tell the House whether or not the contract includes the sale of seals for the purposes of providing seal penises? Would the minister also tell the House why Canada is supporting a deal that allows for the export of seals to China?

Hon. Brian Tobin (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for St. John's West for her question.

A contract has been entered into between Terra Nova Fisheries of Newfoundland and Labrador and a Shanghai firm in China. It is a contract that provides for the use of some 50,000 mature, adult harp seals out of a quota of 186,000 from a healthy and growing herd of three million.

The contract utilizes the full seal. It involves the shipment of machinery into Newfoundland and Labrador for semi-processing of the product into pelts, blubber oil, byproducts and oils for finished processing of pharmaceuticals in China.

The project is not dependent upon any one part of the animal. It is not even directed at any one part of the animal. Rather it is a normal processing operation, I remind the House, that flows from a 500-year old tradition. I believe it is good news for Canada.

* * *

[*Translation*]

ALUMINIUM INDUSTRY

Mr. André Caron (Jonquière): Mr. Speaker, Canada and four other aluminum producing countries have committed themselves, last week, to helping Russian aluminum plants to modernize, in exchange for a reduction in Russian aluminum production. Canada, for one, will help in the privatizing, modernizing and industrial development of Russian aluminum plants.

Did the Minister for International Trade analyse the medium-term impact of the modernization of Russian aluminum plants on our own aluminum industry? If so, could he table the results of those analyses?

[*English*]

Hon. Roy MacLaren (Minister for International Trade): Mr. Speaker, the agreements that have been reached with regard to the orderly marketing of aluminium involve in part assistance to the Soviet industry to modernize and to improve its productive capacities. The basic point is that all this is directed to assuring that the disruption in aluminium markets we have seen in the past months and in the past year does not continue.

I would be pleased to provide the member with additional information if he so desires.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Caron (Jonquière): Mr. Speaker, this probably means that the minister did not really study the impact of last week's agreement on our aluminum industry.

Since he has also allocated several million dollars for the construction of a huge aluminum smelter in South Africa, could the minister acknowledge that the recent action of his government will jeopardize the jobs of thousands of Quebec aluminum workers, when these new and improved Russian aluminum plants are in operation?

(1155)

[*English*]

Hon. Roy MacLaren (Minister for International Trade): Mr. Speaker, no, not at all. With reference to EDC financing of the engineering studies by a Montreal firm of the aluminium smelter in South Africa, I answered that question on an earlier occasion. I would be pleased to provide the member with further information if he so wishes.

* * *

INDIAN AFFAIRS

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

The Semiahmoo First Nations band in British Columbia is in the process of unjustly evicting two long term non-native residents from the reserve. Instead of attempting to mediate or resolve the issue, the department initiated eviction proceedings and is demanding that these residents pay double the rent for 60 days as they attempt to sell their homes. Unfortunately the evicted residents have been told their homes cannot be sold without a signed lease in place.

Oral Questions

On February 23 the minister told the House that he and his party stand on the side of those who are discriminated against. Is the minister prepared to live up to his commitment of standing up for those who are being discriminated against and protecting the interests of those being evicted?

Mr. Jack Iyerak Anawak (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development):

[Editor's Note: Member spoke in Inuktitut.]

[English]

I would like to inform the hon. member that I will make this information known to the minister and a response will be forthcoming.

Ms. Val Meredith (Surrey—White Rock—South Langley): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question. As the government moves toward dismantling the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and the implementation of aboriginal self-government, could the government guarantee that the rights of all Canadians regardless of race, gender or status will be protected?

Mr. Jack Iyerak Anawak (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Mr. Speaker, absolutely. I remind the hon. member that on the issue of self-government we did not have the privilege of being asked whether a government would be set up before a government was set up in our land.

* * *

[Translation]

BILINGUALISM BONUS

Mrs. Madeleine Dalphond—Guiral (Laval—Centre): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Solicitor General. Yesterday, the Federal Court of Appeal ordered the federal government to pay bilingualism bonuses of \$800 a year to qualified officers of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. It is estimated that the government now owes up to \$4,000 to more than 3,000 officers as well as retired officers of the RCMP.

Does the Solicitor General intend to abide by the unanimous decision of the Federal Court of Appeal and pay the bilingualism bonus to qualified officers of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police?

Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Solicitor General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, that decision raises some very complex issues. It is presently under review, and I will have more information about that in the near future.

[English]

PEARSON INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

Mr. Ed Harper (Simcoe Centre): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Transport.

Mr. Robert Nixon's review of the proposed privatization of Pearson International Airport recommended that Transport Canada proceed with construction at terminals one and two and then establish a non-profit operating authority.

This position is supported by the five regional chairpersons who say that delays will kill several economic development opportunities in the Toronto area.

Why is the minister delaying action when much needed jobs and infrastructure are at stake?

Hon. Douglas Young (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, that is a very serious question. Obviously the reason for some delay is that we want to do what is best for Canada's flagship airport.

The Pearson International Airport is Canada's most important airport. All Canadians would know that we have just gone through a very difficult process in trying to reverse a situation that we as a government did not feel was in the best interest of Canadians and the Canadian taxpayer.

(1200)

I assure my friend we are taking into account all of the concerns being raised by many people not only in the Toronto area but across the country with respect to the future of Pearson airport.

I encourage my friend and others with an interest in this matter to convey their views to the very strong and influential government members making up the metropolitan Toronto caucus who are currently looking at this matter.

* * *

AUTOMOBILE SAFETY

Mr. Jerry Pickard (Essex—Kent): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Transport.

Recently on the television program "Market Place" the issue of automobile safety was analysed. It was noted that federal standards for car bumpers are minimal and that no standards exist for vans.

Recent insurance impact tests show that at eight kilometres per hour, damage resulted in thousands and thousands of dollars. Today's cars sustain more collision damage than those 60 years ago.

What measures is the minister prepared to initiate to improve automobile safety and safety for Canadians?

Routine Proceedings

Hon. Douglas Young (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, it is a very interesting question. I must admit I was astonished to learn of this particularly with respect to minivans, a very popular form of transportation for families. I was very concerned when I learned of that report. I have asked my department to look into it.

Without equivocation I must say it is absolutely intolerable that manufacturers of these vehicles have not taken safety requirements into account which I think would have been essential in anybody's planning. Care should be taken that vehicles constructed and marketed with the primary purpose of providing transportation to parents and young children should meet the most stringent safety standards.

We are going to make it our business to very forcefully encourage manufacturers in this country to respect the need to provide the highest possible standards for vehicles that are transporting families.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

WITHDRAWAL OF COMMENTS

Mr. Darrel Stinson (Okanagan—Shuswap): Mr. Speaker, during the heat of the moment I made a comment about the minister of fisheries and I wish to withdraw that.

Hon. Brian Tobin (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for what I think is a very generous act on his part. I too have been guilty of similar types of comments in the heat of the moment on occasion.

The Speaker: Sometimes I think we should move the chair a little bit closer so I can hear.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS*[English]***OFFICIAL LANGUAGES**

Hon. Arthur C. Eggleton (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for Infrastructure): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to section 48 of the Official Languages Act and Standing Order 32(2) I am pleased to table, in both official languages, the fifth annual report of the President of the Treasury Board concerning official languages in federal institutions covering the fiscal year 1992–93.

[Translation]

Pursuant to Standing Order 32(5), this report is deemed referred to the Standing Joint Committee on Official Languages.

*[English]***CO-OPERATIVES ENERGY AND LOWER CHURCHILL DEVELOPMENT CORPORATIONS**

Mr. George S. Rideout (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Natural Resources): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), I am pleased to table, in both official languages, the 1992 annual reports of the Co-operatives Energy Corporation and the Lower Churchill Development Corporation Ltd.

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*[Translation]***GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE TO PETITIONS**

Mr. Peter Milliken (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 35(8), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to six petitions.

* * *

(1205)

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Hon. Arthur C. Eggleton (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for Infrastructure): Mr. Speaker, in accordance with section 48 of the Official Languages Act, I am pleased as President of the Treasury Board to table, in both official languages, the annual report on Official Languages in Federal Institutions.

[English]

This report covers fiscal year 1992–93. It reports on the progress of the official languages program in federal institutions. I am particularly proud to table this report because institutional bilingualism has come a long way since 1969 when the first Official Languages Act was adopted.

This year, more precisely on September 7, we will celebrate the 25th anniversary of the coming into effect of the first Official Languages Act.

[Translation]

The 1969 legislation made English and French the official languages of Canada for all purposes of Parliament and the Government of Canada so that they would have equality of status in all the institutions of the Parliament and Government of Canada.

Routine Proceedings

[English]

A new Official Languages Act replaced the 1969 legislation on September 15, 1988. It reflects the significant changes that have taken place in the status and use of the two official languages since that first legislation.

The 1988 act further specifies the constitutionally entrenched rights and linguistic principles initially set out in the Constitution Act, 1867 and then in the 1982 Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

In line with the 1982 charter the 1988 act provides the framework and the provisions required to translate constitutional language guarantees and principles into day to day realities.

The annual report on official languages describes the activities carried out and progress achieved by federal institutions in 1992-93 in implementing the act.

[Translation]

It reflects their significant accomplishments in meeting the three main objectives and commitments of the program.

[English]

These are as follows. Within certain limits Canadians can deal with federal institutions in the official language of their choice. In designated bilingual regions employees of these institutions can work in the official language of their choice. English speaking and French speaking Canadians have equal opportunities to obtain employment and advancement in federal institutions.

[Translation]

The government clearly expressed its conviction and commitment to official languages in the recent speech from the throne.

[English]

Our cultural heritage and our official languages are at the very core of our Canadian identity and are sources of social and economic enrichment.

In making sure that federal institutions live up to their obligations under the Official Languages Act the government will continue to transform this conviction and commitment into reality in its day to day operations and in its contracts with Canadians right across the country.

[Translation]

Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay (Rimouski—Témiscouata): Mr. Speaker, the annual report *Official Languages in Federal Institutions* shows beyond a shadow of a doubt that there is still a long way to go to reach true fairness for the French speaking citizens of this country.

The act could have been a development tool for francophone and Acadian communities in Canada by ensuring access to the public service in French. Unfortunately, the way the government views and implements its mission, it is making only Quebec bilingual. Is it the government's aim to destroy the stronghold of the French speaking community in North America?

Let us look more closely at some figures.

(1210)

In Quebec, where the English speaking population is 10 per cent, the federal public service has 52.7 per cent bilingual positions, that is 15,945 out of a total of 30,234 positions. If the same principle were applied to Canada as a whole, the number of bilingual positions should be 30,666 instead of 7,465. Therefore, there is a glaring and shameful deficit of 23,000 French or bilingual positions for francophones.

For my colleagues' benefit, let us take a look at the data province by province. Reform Party members who think that bilingualism costs too much should be happy to see that so little is done in that regard. The Northwest Territories should have 122 positions instead of 39; Yukon, 38 instead of 7; British Columbia, 1,600 instead of 394; Alberta, 1,564 instead of 395; Saskatchewan, 672 instead of 175; Manitoba, 2,238 instead of 565; Ontario, excluding the National Capital, 9,136 instead of 2,762; Nova Scotia, 2,755 instead of 750; Newfoundland, 132 instead of 63; and New Brunswick, 12,339 instead of 2,680.

In conclusion, in this year of the 25th anniversary of the Official Languages Act, the government has chosen to move the clock back 40 years by transferring the operations of the Collège militaire royal de Saint-Jean to Kingston, where Premier Bob Rae used too narrow an interpretation in determining that the number of French-speaking people in that community did not warrant it being declared a bilingual district.

The Treasury Board and this government therefore do not give us much to rejoice over, and this anniversary, on September 7 next, should rather be considered as a day of mourning, with the Canadian flag at half-mast.

[English]

Mr. Bob Ringma (Nanaimo—Cowichan): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. President of the Treasury Board for this opportunity to respond to his interesting report.

Let me first underline that our party is not against bilingualism. We are not. In fact, we encourage it on a personal basis. What we are against is the waste of resources brought about by the application of the Official Languages Act and its divisiveness to Canada as a country.

Although no doubt well intentioned, the continued blind application of the act, to use the words of the President of the Treasury Board, "in making sure that federal institutions live up

Routine Proceedings

to their obligations under the act” is the very thing that is causing resentment across the land.

The minister proudly states that English speaking and French speaking Canadians have equal opportunities to obtain employment and advancement in federal institutions. However, within the last two weeks we heard the Minister of National Defence say with pride that officers of the Canadian forces aspiring to the rank of lieutenant colonel or above will have to be bilingual. This same restriction is being applied at the non-commissioned officer level.

In a country where more than 60 per cent of francophones speak no English and over 80 per cent of anglophones speak no French, a person should be able to pursue a career solely in either official language with the expectation that if he or she does everything correctly, there is a reasonable chance for success in that career. Application of the Official Languages Act takes away this hope from the majority in both language groups. It fosters resentment and division in Canada.

We would be among the first to applaud the opportunity for francophones to pursue a career in the French language.

(1215)

We are appalled by the fact that the number of jobs available to unilingual francophones has dropped 26 per cent since 1974 thanks to the government's ridiculous pursuit of the bilingual post designation.

We are equally upset that unilingual anglophones are suffering the same form of discrimination.

[*Translation*]

Let me repeat again that we are not opposed to bilingualism. We agree that both languages are necessary in government institutions, such as this Parliament, and the courts of justice. On the other hand, we are opposed to the antagonism and the waste of resources caused by the Official Languages Act over the past 25 years.

[*English*]

I want to conclude by saying I am deeply distressed also by the inaction of the chief parliamentary body overseeing the Official Languages Act. I am a member of the Standing Joint Committee on Official Languages which has yet to meet this session. My research indicates this committee has met only nine times in the past two years and has not issued a single recommendation to this House. It saddens me to think that such a vital part of the fabric of Canadian society appears to be sorely neglected by us, Canada's elected representatives.

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

FINANCE

Mr. Jim Peterson (Willowdale): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Finance.

In accordance with its order of reference of Tuesday, March 8, 1994 the committee has considered Bill C-14, an act to provide borrowing authority for the fiscal year beginning April 1, 1994, and has agreed to report it without amendment.

A copy of the minutes and proceedings and evidence relating to this bill, issue number 18 which includes this report, is hereby tabled, all of which is respectfully submitted.

I would like to again thank the hard working members of our committee from all parties.

* * *

PETITIONS

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, I am pleased to table a petition signed by a number of Canadians asking this House to preserve article 241 in the Criminal Code which forbids euthanasia and assisted suicide.

This petition was circulated by Mrs. Theresa Ducharme of Winnipeg and her organization called People in Equal Participation.

I want to outline for the House how difficult it was for Mrs. Ducharme to secure names for her petition. She is a victim of polio, she is on an artificial respirator, she is epileptic, diabetic and confined to a wheelchair. She knows how precious life is and told me that is why she wanted to circulate this petition.

KILLER CARDS

Mr. George S. Rideout (Moncton): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, I am pleased to present a petition dealing with killer cards. One section of the petition states: “We abhor crimes of violence against persons and we believe that killer trading cards offer nothing positive for children or adults to admire or emulate but rather contribute to violence”.

RURAL POSTAL SERVICE

Mr. Jake E. Hoepfner (Lisgar—Marquette): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to present a petition from my constituents in Austin, Manitoba.

The signatories of this petition are concerned about the reduction of postal personnel in their community and about the normal services which rural ridings are entitled to.

Government Orders

They would like the government to take notice of this when it deals with that issue.

(1220)

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Ed Harper (Simcoe Centre): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of summer residents of my constituency of Simcoe Centre, I would like to present this petition which calls on Parliament to take a fresh look at Canada's current policy on official languages and to hold a national referendum on the question.

SERIAL KILLER CARDS

Mr. Murray Calder (Wellington—Grey—Dufferin—Simcoe): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, it is my duty and honour to rise in the House to present this petition of 501 names, duly certified by the clerk of petitions, on behalf of the undersigned residents of Wellington—Grey—Dufferin—Simcoe and the surrounding area, in particular Collingwood and area.

The petitioners humbly pray and call upon Parliament to amend the laws of Canada to prohibit the importation, distribution, sale and manufacture of killers cards in law and to advise the producers of killer cards that their product, if destined for Canada, will be seized and destroyed.

PENSIONS

Mr. Ronald J. Duhamel (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Public Works and Government Services): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition here whereby the petitioners ask the government to deal with pensioners' pensions in an extremely sensitive and fair way. They want to ensure that today's pension plans respond to their actual needs.

[*Translation*]

They realize that for several years now they have not received the amount necessary to have the quality of life they are entitled to.

[*English*]

They also want to make sure that whatever future plans are changed, if they are to be changed, they take into consideration the unique situation of our citizens.

Finally, they wish us all to recognize that the country that we have today and many of the benefits that we enjoy are as a result of their contributions to this society.

[*Translation*]

We must not forget them.

[*English*]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Bob Ringma (Nanaimo—Cowichan): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, it is my privilege to rise in the House

to present a petition, duly certified by the clerk of petitions, on behalf of many concerned constituents of Nanaimo—Cowichan and the surrounding area.

The petitioners humbly call upon Parliament to enact legislation providing for a referendum binding on Parliament to accept or reject two official languages. Given Canada's current financial restraints the petitioners feel the existing official languages law is very expensive and is actually more divisive than cohesive.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Shall all questions stand?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): I wish to inform the House that pursuant to Standing Order 33(2)(b), because of the ministerial statement Government Orders will be extended by 11 minutes.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

CANADA OIL AND GAS OPERATIONS ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-6, an act to amend the Canada Oil and Gas Operations Act, the Canada Petroleum Resources Act and the National Energy Board Act and to make consequential amendments to other acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. George S. Rideout (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Natural Resources): Mr. Speaker, before our interruption for question period we were discussing Bill C-6 which deals with the transfer to the National Energy Board of the administration and regulation of activities on frontier lands which were previously administered by the Canadian Oil and Gas Lands Administration or COGLA.

Industry needs to have certain and clear sets of rules by which to operate. It needs to be confident that regulation will be carried out in a professional and highly competent manner. We believe these qualities are now exemplified in the National Energy Board.

For more than 30 years the National Energy Board has been an effective regulatory agency. The board's experience in reviewing proposals for complex energy projects has provided it with extensive expertise in environmental, socio economic and technical areas. With the addition of highly qualified and dedicated

Government Orders

staff from the former COGLA, the board is well placed to take on the authority to regulate frontier oil and gas.

(1225)

We should also emphasize that this reorganization does not mean that the government places less importance on our frontier responsibilities.

In recent years companies have shifted their attention to other regions and adopted a go slow attitude in the Canadian frontiers. This was done primarily as a result of the poor economics of developing these high cost resources in an environment of lower oil prices.

In these circumstances it is all too easy to neglect our frontiers or to conclude that they are too costly to ever attract serious and continuing exploration activity. That, however, is not our intention.

Canada's frontiers north of 60 and off shore hold more than two-thirds of Canada's remaining conventional oil and natural gas resources. Whatever the short-term outlook these areas will be a significant and growing part of our energy future. Consequently, effective regulation of Frontier Oil and Gas exploration is a priority and because it is important the federal government will retain a meaningful role in the frontiers.

The crown is, after all, the resource owner and has an obligation to ensure that this resource is managed in the best manner possible for the benefit of the Canadian people.

The amendment proposed to Bill C-6 do not transfer the full range of ministerial responsibility to the National Energy Board. In keeping with good regulatory practice the government will retain the responsibility to establish the overall policy framework for frontier petroleum development. The crown also maintains the power to grant the legal permission or exclusive rights to companies which in some cases involve some discretion.

It would not be appropriate to transfer these powers to a regulatory body.

Specifically the federal government will retain authority to publicly tender rights to explore, issue exploration production and development licences, approve benefit plans, and set and collect royalties.

We are serious about our responsibilities to the Canadian public with respect to frontier oil and gas development. Key COGLA staff have been retained in both the Departments of Natural Resources and Indian Affairs and Northern Development to help us look after these responsibilities.

Mr. Speaker, at this juncture we would like to bring to your attention some other elements of the bill before you. Although unrelated to the regulation of petroleum activities on frontier lands two areas of legislative amendment relate to the existing operation of the National Energy Board and were identified as requiring urgent attention.

Bill C-6 grants certain NEB staff inspection and enforcement powers related to pipelines. By providing mechanisms for speedier decision-making these amendments will help ensure the safety of the public and the protection of property and the environment.

[Translation]

Bill C-6 also provides the NEB with the flexibility to ease the regulatory burden for small pipeline companies.

In conclusion, the restructuring proposed in Bill C-6 makes sense from all possible vantage points. In particular, at a time in which Canadians are looking carefully for the ways and means to restore common sense to our public institutions, it is an important and timely proposal.

[English]

Just as importantly the quality and integrity of the regulatory process will be maintained. After all the frontiers are part of Canada's energy future.

[Translation]

Mr. René Canuel (Matapédia—Matane): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his very consistent and almost complete statement of the purpose of Bill C-6.

The bill before us today should have received the assent of this House a long time ago. With the authority to regulate provided by this bill, transfers already made to the National Energy Board by the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources and the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development are formalized.

(1230)

Bill C-6 also formalizes the expanded powers of the NEB on pipelines under its jurisdiction, namely international and inter-provincial pipelines.

The bill also provides for minor amendments to related legislation. On the surface, it does not seem to contain any original idea of this Liberal government. As these powers apply to frontier oil and gas activity, several provinces where there are no federal/provincial shared management agreements will be affected by this transfer of authority and increased level of responsibility.

For example, the Northwest Territories and the Yukon, which are Crown lands and public lands, will be directly affected by Bill C-6. Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, British Columbia and Ontario will be affected in so far as the regulating of pipelines is concerned. Since Newfoundland and Nova Scotia will be administering their offshore resources jointly with the federal government, they will not be affected by the transfer of authority provided for in this bill.

In addition, the coming into force of the Northern Accord and the signing of a joint administration agreement with the Northwest Territories will, in the medium term, result in the loss of NEB authority over these lands. The NEB would maintain its

Government Orders

authority to regulate oil and gas activities only in the case of offshore resources in the Pacific and in the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

Quebec, meanwhile, has been only marginally affected by the changes to the National Energy Board's mandate since 1991. However, should resources be discovered offshore in the waters of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, then the question of resource ownership would inevitably arise, just as it arose when resources were discovered offshore from Nova Scotia and Newfoundland.

Clearly, Quebec and the Bloc Québécois would set some conditions in terms of the legal and constitutional options of having Quebec's and the provinces' ownership of any potential resources recognized.

In a number of cases involving gas and oil distribution in Canada, Quebec has repeatedly voiced its opposition to various federal policies, notably in recent cases where legislation, regulations and constitutional interpretation appeared to blatantly infringe on Quebec's jurisdiction and economic interests.

I will briefly share with you two of those issues, so as to clearly express some Quebec positions which, I believe, federal authorities did not take into consideration thus far. We are not talking here about pouring out a long litany of unfounded complaints. The Bloc Québécois was elected in Ottawa both to promote Quebec sovereignty and, in the meantime, to defend Quebecers' interests within the present federal system.

I am well aware that my colleagues from Western Canada are very sensitive to issues concerning natural resources ownership. I must tell them that I share the same sensitivity. I would just like to say that no one will challenge the representatives of western Canada or of Quebec for putting forward what they perceive as their constituents' interests.

(1235)

First, the federal government is partly responsible for the decline of the refining industry in Quebec. Until the early 1980s, Quebec exported refined petroleum products. During that decade, Quebec lost more than half of its refining capacity and as a result was forced to import part of its consumption.

The economic costs of this change in the petroleum industry were enormous, especially for Montreal, which had been a centre for refining petroleum products in North America since the 1940s. Quebec lost its leadership to the benefit of Ontario. The Borden commission of 1961 is responsible for this decline since it decided to give western oil producers a captive market in Canada. It was also decided that the pipelines taking oil from the West to the East would stop in Ontario—this was called the Borden line. With the coming of the Borden line and the requirement for Quebec refiners to buy western oil which was carried by pipeline only as far as Ontario, Quebec definitely lost its geographical advantage as a refiner for central Canada, to the benefit of Ontario.

The federal government has never repaired the damage done by its energy policy. Quebec lost thousands of jobs. Head offices, businesses and research and development that could have put Quebec at the forefront of the industry were lost.

I would also like to raise another very current issue and that is the ruling made last week by the Supreme Court of Canada regarding exploitation of electricity. That decision led us to believe that other conflicts might occur in the future. The court empowers the National Energy Board to subject the granting of hydro-electricity export licenses to an environmental assessment. This decision is a setback for Quebec which always wanted to assert its jurisdiction regarding environmental matters.

Already in 1990 the National Energy Board had imposed two conditions before granting Hydro Quebec an electricity export license for the States of New York and Vermont. These two conditions provided that these exports should not contravene federal environmental standards and that the energy-producing facilities would have to be subject to the federal environmental assessment and review process.

Quebec's Energy Minister, Lise Bacon, who was far from being a nasty separatist, declared at that time that this federal intrusion into provincial jurisdiction was completely intolerable. In 1992, another Quebec Liberal minister, Pierre Paradis, who was then Minister of the Environment and who is not a nasty separatist, said in a letter addressed to his federal counterpart that the bill he was about to introduce contained elements which were a perfect example of totalitarianism and domination by the federal government and that it continued to embitter relations between Quebec and Ottawa.

(1240)

Quebec has already successfully appealed that decision in the Federal Court of Appeal. Following this victory for our province, in turn, the James Bay Cree appealed the NEB's decision to grant a hydro facility operating licence in their region.

The recent Supreme Court decision will have an impact on the development of Quebec's hydroelectric resources and will make the costs of any new project higher.

Moreover, the Supreme Court decision imposes a public review to limit the development of hydroelectricity, power lines and production facilities. Before a provincial development project can be undertaken, it would be very surprising if the NEB did not require the equivalent for gas or oil exports, thereby limiting the environmental impact to pipelines, and overlooking anything having to do with the greenhouse effect, air pollution, depletion of resources and other environmental considerations.

I conclude by saying that the Bloc Québécois is not necessarily opposed to this bill. However, since the NEB will only have jurisdiction over small parts of the Canadian territory, once all the joint management agreements are signed, the parliamentary

Government Orders

committee will have to review this legislation with a long-term perspective in mind.

We must not only straighten out an existing situation; eventually we will have to have a modern approach regarding all issues related to the management of offshore natural resources. We have to take reality into account and propose alternative structural changes which will give each province responsibility for its own future interests.

Needless to say, if necessary, we will make sure each province gets jurisdiction over offshore resources. You can count on us to do that.

[English]

Mr. Jim Silye (Calgary Centre): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to address Bill C-6, an act to amend the Canada Oil and Gas Operations Act, the Canada Petroleum Resources Act and the National Energy Board Act.

In the interest of reducing the duplication of comments and overlap of debaters I will speak on behalf of the Reform Party which in principle supports Bill C-6 in the spirit has been put forward by the Department of Natural Resources and the National Energy Board.

As the member of Parliament for Calgary Centre, I need only look out the window of my constituency office to see the importance of the oil and gas industry to the people, the city and the province of Alberta.

When the government, especially a Liberal government, begins to change legislation that regulates this industry, people and companies alike get nervous and express their concerns, especially when it involves giving power to a federal board where it may overlap in the future with an area of provincial jurisdiction.

Having consulted with the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers and the National Energy Board our party is confident that Bill C-6 deals primarily with the centralization and the consolidation of technical and regulatory functions to the National Energy Board from the ministerial level of the department of natural resources and in some cases the judicial system.

According to the National Energy Board, this process of streamlining will save the government \$5 million. This is a positive step but remains just the tip of the iceberg when one considers the overall amount of government waste that has existed over the years.

When I spoke in this House on Bill C-2, I encouraged the Department of National Revenue to initiate line by line, item by item reviews of the department to find out exactly where money is being spent.

Today, while discussing Bill C-6, I want to ask the Department of Natural Resources to do the same. These results should

be made public in their entirety in the form of an annual report which could then be distributed to all parties for review.

(1245)

My party wants the federal government and all its departments to be fiscally responsible and exercise restraint wherever possible. We believe strongly in the streamlining of government operations like those in Bill C-6 and encourage the federal government to do more of the same.

Less government bureaucracy in the oil and gas industry means quicker decisions so that more time can be spent by businesses exploring for new resources and/or building new pipelines.

Freeing up the marketplace from government intervention creates opportunities, incentives and real jobs, long term meaningful jobs. It generates real revenue and sends a message to investors and to all Canadians that this country wants a future based on prosperity and not on high unemployment and high debt.

The Liberal government must continue to cut red tape and encourage the spending of equity capital from the private sector and not debt capital by the government as is the current situation.

For too long governments have relied on the spending of debt capital versus equity capital in the funding of megaprojects that have wasted billions of taxpayers dollars, Hibernia and the Lloydminster upgrader, for example.

My party supports a free market system, one in which supply and demand regulate the industry, not political agendas. Government should facilitate and not hinder the production and efficient delivery of exports.

We support the fact that Bill C-6 will also provide the National Energy Board with the authority to ease the regulatory burden for small pipeline companies that do not have the resources for drawn out hearings and application processes. It enables them to participate in the process without being hung up in months and months of delays and waiting for hearings.

Small businesses like these play a large role in job creation and need to be free to compete in the marketplace.

These significant changes cannot, however, come at the expense of the environment. Bill C-6 takes some positive steps concerning industry safety and environmental conservation. For example, by increasing the power for National Energy Board inspectors to make immediate decisions in the field on safety and environmental violations, potential disasters can be avoided.

Decisions in the past had to be made by the full board which caused delays and proved to be an inefficient way to ensure companies meet high safety standards.

Government Orders

The NEB plays a large role in the oil and gas industry and is held in high regard. We commend and encourage it to continue its high standards of work.

The consolidation achieved through this act eliminates the need for courts and politicians to be involved in the daily operations of frontier activity. The new power given to the NEB should subsequently encourage continuity, consistency and expediency within the department.

Having said that, there are still certain members of the oil and gas community that have expressed concern with the fact that Bill C-6 will eliminate the oil and gas committee which was an independent appeal board.

With no impartial appeal process the National Energy Board could in effect become judge, jury and sole executioner for companies that may disagree with the decision that it hands down. Therefore, the precedent setting decisions that are made will subsequently be extremely important for politicians to monitor, ensuring there are no destructive precedents set.

I would like to conclude by reminding the House that previous Liberal governments played a significant role in crippling the oil and gas industry in Alberta with their national energy policy. We do not wish to see this happen again.

We encourage this new Liberal government to be different and continue to improve the regulatory environment in Canada, discourage red tape and the size of bureaucracy and promote free and open competition in the private sector and leave the industry alone. With respect to discriminatory grants or subsidies, it does not need them, nor does it want them, with new environmental taxes like a carbon tax and wasteful job creation programs.

That is my submission on Bill C-6.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Pomerleau (Anjou—Rivière-des-Prairies): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-6 before the House today is in fact a piece of legislation the previous government did not have time to pass and which died several times on the Order Paper.

(1250)

Essentially, this bill only gives legal basis to the role currently played by the National Energy Board ever since its merger with the Canada Oil and Gas Lands Administration in 1991.

As my colleague from Matapédia—Matane said earlier, the Bloc Québécois approves the principle of the bill and will vote for it at the second reading stage. However, to put things into perspective, I would like to mention that the terms of reference of the NEB was, as recently as last week, challenged before the Supreme Court of Canada.

My colleague from Matapédia—Matane also reviewed the new constitutional realities concerning the need to conduct environmental impact assessments on any hydro projects undertaken for foreign markets. We are anxiously waiting for the decision the National Energy Board will should make, following the ruling of the Supreme Court, as to the need to extend such assessments to gas and oil exportation projects.

Of course, if Quebec becomes sovereign, we should be free of this control over our interests. In the meantime, we think it is crucial to promote and defend the interests of Quebec within the current federal system. Defending Quebec's interests does not prevent us in any way from also defending and promoting the interests of Canadians and the rest of Canada, provided, of course, that theirs are fully compatible with ours and are in no way against Quebec's interests.

Yesterday, my colleague from Rimouski—Témiscouata brilliantly demonstrated this when she defended the cultural interests of English Canada against excessive control by American publishing multinationals. The Leader of the Official Opposition himself does not fail opportunity to stand up for common interests of Canada and Quebec in his speeches which attract considerable attention, including his stand on the presence of Canadian UN troops in Bosnia.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who took the advice of the Bloc Québécois and yesterday extended for another six months the mandate of our UN troops in Bosnia.

But to come back to the issue of oil and gas development, there is a subject which involves the financial interests of all Canadians and Quebecers. I am talking about the Hibernia megaproject, of which our friends in the Reform Party have just spoken.

Left to market forces alone—and I think members of the Reform Party will fully agree on this—the Hibernia project would never have come about. It exists only because two governments, this one and the one before, persisted in investing billions of dollars in this venture whose outcome nobody can predict. Such quandering of public funds should give the shivers to anyone in this House who takes taxpayers' interests to heart.

In fact, what worries me most about the Hibernia adventure is the extremely high financial risk. Just think that Chevron, Mobil and Murphy, the oil companies that are partners in that venture, have so little confidence in it that they demand that the federal government, and ultimately the Canadian taxpayers, bear a huge share of the financial risk.

Notwithstanding the heated debate on the relative cost of each barrel extracted from the Hibernia and Avalon oilfields compared to the international price, one has to admit that it takes an act of faith to believe that the project will ultimately be

Government Orders

profitable. As a professor at Memorial University said so eloquently: "We are down to gut feelings and faith about it".

The profitability of that project, if it is ever profitable, can only be marginal at best. Moreover, the rate of return depends on unpredictable fluctuations in three distinct and very important factors. The first is the quantity of oil that can really be extracted from this field. The second is the final cost of building and operating the gigantic drilling rig. The third, which is both the most unpredictable and the determining factor, is the price of oil in 1997, the year when production is supposed to begin, and during the productive life of the field, which is 15 years.

(1255)

I could refrain from mentioning the risks of environmental disasters that are never desirable but always possible, but I have to raise the issue of the safety of the platform itself, which will be towed 300 kilometres off the coast of St. John's, right in the middle of what is referred to today as Iceberg Alley, in the area where the *Titanic* sank in 1912. The risks of disaster are so great that it seems impossible for the promoters of the project to insure the platform for its full value in case a disaster should occur. So it is obviously something important.

It seems to me that Canadian taxpayers should not have to trust the federal government blindly, as it is asking them to do. They should be informed of all the costs and the great risks associated with this project. After all, it is the money of Canadian and Quebec taxpayers that the government is throwing at this project to prevent it from sinking.

The money invested by the federal government on behalf of taxpayers currently exceeds \$3 billion in direct grants, loan guarantees, interest payments and direct equity participation in this project. And I would remind all Canadians who are listening to this debate that \$1 billion equals \$1,000 million. So, \$3 billion means that the federal government is asking Canadians to trust it with a \$3,000 million investment in a single project, over and above the hundreds of millions it has already invested in activities related to the exploration and development of resources off Canada's east coast.

In one of his recent annual reports, the Auditor General of Canada expressed legitimate concern about Hibernia. He said

that it was a high risk venture due to fluctuating prices as well as technological and environmental issues. The Auditor General's analysis is still valid today, and even more so during a period of fiscal restrictions, when we are making deep cuts in unemployment insurance. Billions of dollars, thousands of millions, have been invested in high risk ventures based on faith but, when cutbacks are needed, we do not hesitate to cut benefits to the unemployed. This government seems to think that unemployed people are the problem.

If I brought up the issue of Hibernia today, it is probably because I am wary. The Bloc Québécois is not in power and has no ambition in that direction; that is quite obvious. We cannot stop this massive investment of public funds in a high risk venture based on faith. However, as the Official Opposition, we will fight to ensure that, should this project go forward, it will generate as much economic activity as possible in Canada and Quebec. It is the least we can do.

We will hound this Liberal government to ensure that subcontracts promised to Canadian and Quebec businesses by the previous government and the Hibernia consortium will be honoured and, if possible, maximized.

As for other megaprojects whose profitability is more than doubtful, the Bloc Québécois will defend the interests of Canadian and Quebec taxpayers.

In short, the Bloc Québécois will support Bill C-6 at second reading. We will look into the legitimate complaints that will eventually be brought to our attention before or during the committee stage of this bill.

[English]

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

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Shall I call it 2.30?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): It being 2.30 p.m. the House stands adjourned until Monday next at 11 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 1 p.m.)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Friday, March 11, 1994

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Customs Tariff

Bill C-5. Consideration in committee of the whole.	2161
On clause 1	2161
Mr. Bergeron	2161
Mr. Peters	2161
Mr. Paré	2162
Mr. Hoepfner	2162
(Clause agreed to.)	2165
(Title agreed to.)	2165
(Bill reported.)	2165
Motion for concurrence	2165
Mr. Peters	2165
(Motion agreed to)	2165
Motion for third reading	2165
Mr. Bergeron	2166
Mr. Hoepfner	2167
(Motion agreed to, bill read the third time and passed.)	2167

Canada Oil and Gas Operations Act

Bill C-6. Motion for second reading.	2167
Mr. Peters	2167
Mr. Rideout	2167

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Women in Agriculture

Mrs. Ur	2168
---------------	------

Government Spending

Mr. Pomerleau	2168
---------------------	------

Parliamentary Publications

Mr. Speaker (Lethbridge) 2169

Province of Alberta

Mr. Lee 2169

Education

Mr. Murray 2169

Electoral Redistribution in Saskatchewan

Mr. Bodnar 2169

VIA Rail

Mr. Canuel 2169

Forestry

Mr. Gilmour 2170

Les Braves Volleyball Team

Mr. Bryden 2170

Terrorism

Mr. Berger 2170

National Transport Agency

Mr. Jordan 2170

Canada's UN Troops

Mr. Paré 2171

Canadian Athletes

Mr. Ramsay 2171

Travel by Members of Parliament

Mrs. Parrish 2171

Violence Against Women

Mrs. Gaffney	2171
--------------------	------

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Fight Against Poverty

Mr. Gauthier (Roberval)	2171
Mr. Chrétien (Saint-Maurice)	2172
Mr. Gauthier (Roberval)	2172
Mr. Chrétien (Saint-Maurice)	2172
Mr. Gauthier (Roberval)	2172
Mr. Chrétien (Saint-Maurice)	2172

Old Age Security

Mr. Péroquin	2172
Mr. Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre)	2172
Mr. Péroquin	2173
Mr. Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre)	2173

Aboriginal Affairs

Mr. Manning	2173
Mr. Massé	2173
Mr. Manning	2173
Mr. Massé	2173
Mr. Manning	2173
Mr. Massé	2173

Collège militaire royal de Saint-Jean

Mr. Leroux (Richmond—Wolfe)	2174
Mr. Collenette	2174
Mr. Leroux (Richmond—Wolfe)	2174
Mr. Collenette	2174

Alan Eagleson

Mr. McClelland	2174
----------------------	------

Mr. Gray	2174
Mr. McClelland	2174
Mr. Gray	2174

Public Finances

Mr. Laurin	2174
Mr. Martin (LaSalle—Émard)	2175
Mr. Laurin	2175
Mr. Martin (LaSalle—Émard)	2175

Military Colleges

Mr. Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)	2175
Mr. Chrétien (Saint—Maurice)	2175
Mr. Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)	2175
Mr. Chrétien (Saint—Maurice)	2175

Information Highway

Mr. Ménard	2175
Mr. Manley	2175
Mr. Ménard	2175
Mr. Manley	2176

Employment

Mr. Calder	2176
Mr. Martin (LaSalle—Émard)	2176

Kemano Project

Mr. Harris	2176
Mr. Tobin	2176
Mr. Harris	2176
Mr. Tobin	2176

VIA Rail

Mr. Bernier (Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead)	2177
Mr. Young	2177
Mr. Bernier (Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead)	2177

Mr. Young 2177

Unemployment Insurance Commission

Mr. Gouk 2177

Mr. Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre) 2177

Mr. Gouk 2177

Mr. Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre) 2177

Sealing

Mrs. Payne 2178

Mr. Tobin 2178

Aluminium Industry

Mr. Caron 2178

Mr. MacLaren 2178

Mr. Caron 2178

Mr. MacLaren 2178

Indian Affairs

Ms. Meredith 2178

Mr. Anawak 2179

Ms. Meredith 2179

Mr. Anawak 2179

Bilingualism Bonus

Mrs. Dalphond-Guiral 2179

Mr. Gray 2179

Pearson International Airport

Mr. Harper (Simcoe Centre) 2179

Mr. Young 2179

Automobile Safety

Mr. Pickard 2179

Mr. Young 2180

Points of Order

Withdrawal of Comments

Mr. Stinson	2180
Mr. Tobin	2180

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Official Languages in Federal Institutions

Mr. Eggleton	2180
--------------------	------

Co-operatives Energy Corporation and Lower Churchill Development Corporation Ltd.

Mr. Rideout	2180
-------------------	------

Government's response to petitions

Mr. Milliken	2180
--------------------	------

Official Languages in Federal Institutions

Mr. Eggleton	2180
Mrs. Tremblay (Rimouski—Témiscouata)	2181
Mr. Ringma	2181

Committees of the House

Finance

Mr. Peterson	2182
--------------------	------

Petitions

Criminal Code

Mr. Boudria	2182
-------------------	------

Killer Cards

Mr. Rideout	2182
-------------------	------

Rural Postal Service

Mr. Hoepfner	2182
--------------------	------

Official Languages

Mr. Harper (Simcoe Centre) 2183

Serial Killer Cards

Mr. Calder 2183

Pensions

Mr. Duhamel 2183

Official Languages

Mr. Ringma 2183

Questions on the Order Paper

Mr. Milliken 2183

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Canada Oil and Gas Operations Act

Bill C-6. Consideration resumed of motion for second reading 2183

Mr. Rideout 2183

Mr. Canuel 2184

Mr. Silye 2186

Mr. Pomerleau 2187

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee.) 2188