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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, February 21, 2001

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday February 21, 2001

The House met at 2 p.m.

[English]

Prayers

• (1400)

[Translation]

The Speaker: As is our practice on Wednesday we will now sing O Canada, led by the hon. member for St. John's East.

[Editor's Note: Members sang the national anthem]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Claude Drouin (Beauce, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the federal government is keeping its promises. With respect to the environment, this week we announced a \$120.2 million investment to accelerate action on clean air.

Among other things, the measures announced will regulate vehicle production to provide cleaner transportation, will make a 90% reduction in the emission of smog-causing emissions from industry and will improve the network of pollutant monitoring stations.

As well, the federal government has signed the ozone annex with the United States. Under this agreement, we will be working in collaboration with our neighbours to the south in reducing pollution from vehicle emissions.

We know that air pollution is responsible for many heart and lung diseases. The problem concerns us all. I am proud that the federal government has made a commitment to improving our living conditions.

This clearly shows its concern for the health of its population.

PRIME MINISTER OF CANADA

Mr. Werner Schmidt (Kelowna, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, with these words, "I am just an ordinary MP looking after the interests of my constituents", the Prime Minister dismisses his intervention in the application of a \$600,000 loan for a friend.

The Prime Minister is no ordinary MP. He appoints the members of the Senate, supreme court judges and ministers of the crown. No one can appeal his decisions. He declares government bills and motions to be votes of confidence and does not permit members of his Liberal Party to vote the wishes of their constituents.

When the leader of the country engages in activities that are—

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member is aware that Standing Order 31 statements may not be used as an attack on another hon. member. It is out of order.

* * *

OXFORD

Mr. John Finlay (Oxford, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on March 7, 2001, a tug of war team from my riding of Oxford will travel to Taiwan to participate in the second annual MacKay Memorial Tug of War Championship.

The Oxford-Zorra girls tug of war team has been invited to compete in this tournament because Oxford county is the birthplace of the Reverend George Leslie MacKay, a Presbyterian missionary highly revered for his work in Taiwan.

This trip will help to advance the twinning relationship between Oxford and the Tan-shui region of Taiwan by providing the participants with an exciting opportunity to participate in and experience a different culture.

The Oxford-Zorra girls, accompanied by the Ingersoll pipe band, look to carry on the tradition of another successful tug of war team from Oxford, the Mighty Men of Zorra. That legendary team became world champions at the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago.

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AIR CANADA

Mr. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to bring from a constituent a non-partisan issue that every member in the House should find very distressing.

S. O. 31

Air Canada has just increased the change fee for transborder fares from \$100 to \$145, a 45% increase. It appears that on March 1 it will burden all Canadians with this increase by also applying it to domestic fares. This is unacceptable.

To stabilize our economy, this nation has inflation targets of less than 3%. This quasi-monopoly has the nerve to impose a 45% increase in the fee. Quarante-cinq pour cent, c'est incroyable.

Canadians are turning increasingly to the competition because of such audacity. Canadians do not want it, businesses do not want it, Yukoners do not want it and I do not believe the constituents of any member here want an Air Canada increase.

I urge all members to stand up and be counted and say to Air Canada that enough is enough.

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CANDLELIGHT VIGIL

Mr. Gurbax Malhi (Bramalea—Gore—Malton—Springdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today on Parliament Hill the Indo-Canadian community will be joined by the Prime Minister for a candlelight vigil in memory of the victims of the recent earthquake in Gujarat, India.

Reports have confirmed over 30,000 dead and hundreds of thousands left homeless and forced to live in tent cities, dependent on the aid of humanitarian organizations.

I encourage my fellow colleagues to pay their respects to the victims of this terrible tragedy and join the candlelight vigil in the Centre Block, Room 237-C, after question period.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the environment was the big winner last Friday when a Washington state regulatory body recommended against the Sumas Energy 2 power plant proposal.

Thanks to the hard work of Canadians and Americans alike, the message came through loud and clear that the public does not want a power plant built on the edge of the Fraser Valley, Canada's second most polluted air shed.

The regulator's recommendation, however, is only a roadblock and not the end of the road for the SE2 project. The Washington governor now has the final say on whether the proposal can go ahead. It is no longer an environmental decision. That has been resolved. It is now a political decision.

The situation boils down to this. There are no further environmental hearings planned in the United States. There are no National Energy Board meetings planned because they have now been suspended in Canada. The studies are over. The hearings are finished. It is now a political decision and the governor of Washington will make that decision soon.

The question is, will the Minister of the Environment finally stop talking about process and reports and now tell Governor Locke, in the strongest terms possible, that Canada opposes the SE2 project?

* * *

TRADE

Ms. Sophia Leung (Vancouver Kingsway, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the team Canada trade mission to China was a unique opportunity for me to join the Prime Minister and eight provincial premiers on the largest trade mission in Canadian history.

The Prime Minister, as captain of the team, delivered a strong message for human rights to Chinese officials, students and the general public. He stated that human rights not only protect individuals from abuse but also empower people to contribute fully and creatively to building a stronger society.

With \$5.7 billion in new deals for Canadian companies, team Canada was a success for commerce and for advancing Canadian concerns about human rights in China.

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• (1405)

[Translation]

COMMUNITY TELEVISION

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government of Quebec has decided to intervene with the CRTC in support of community television. As we know, this has undergone unique development in Quebec.

In 1997 the CRTC decided to make the existence of community television a precarious one by no longer requiring the cable companies to fund it, thus forcing the majority of these stations to close down.

At that time, the Bloc Québécois intervened to support community television against the diktat of the CRTC, which was thumbing its nose at Quebec's cultural specificity. We also intervened with the CRTC, requesting that it hold public hearings.

When these do take place, the Bloc Québécois intends to continue to pressure the CRTC to ensure the continuation of community television so that regional voices will not be silenced.

[English]

AGRICULTURE

Mrs. Karen Kraft Sloan (York North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a week ago the House witnessed a powerful and moving debate on the crisis facing our family farms.

I want to thank all the farmers I have met with over the past few months, especially the Chapmans, the Donors, the Holtrops and the Oldhams. They gave me the words I needed to share with the members of this House and with Canadians who watched the debate.

Last night our nation's farmers were here in Ottawa sharing the tasty fruits of their labour at a family farm food and wine celebration. This was an unprecedented event that brought members and senators from rural ridings and urban ridings together to meet with our country's agrifood producers.

Together we must continue this very important dialogue and work toward solutions that solve the problems faced on the family farm.

* * *

HEALTH

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are needlessly suffering because federal health bureaucrats in the Surveillance Management Program are dragging their feet on new pharmaceutical drug approvals. In fact, Canada's drug approval process is slower than most other developed nations and the problem is getting worse, not better.

Dr. Russell, a researcher from the University of Alberta, was providing his patients with an exciting new drug to treat arthritis on a trial basis. However, after the trial was over his patients were no longer able to get access to this medicine even though every other country in the developed world has the approved the drug.

Dr. Russell is now doing the only thing his conscience will allow: he is providing his patients with a safe and effective but still unapproved drug.

The Minister of Health has to make a decision. Does he want Dr. Russell to continue to provide his patients with an unapproved drug or would he prefer to force these sick people to wait in pain until Health Canada bureaucrats catch up to the rest of the world?

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SARO PANUCCIO

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to acknowledge Mr. Saro Panuccio on his 50 years as a Canadian citizen in my constituency of Ottawa Centre.

S. O. 31

On February 21, 1951, Mr. Panuccio arrived in Halifax, Nova Scotia with little more than the clothes on his back and a determination to make a better life for himself and others in Canada.

Since then, Saro has received numerous awards for his outstanding volunteer service, especially for making sure that countless new Canadians feel at home in this country and in Ottawa in particular.

In recognition of his tireless efforts, Saro is a recipient of the Governor General's prestigious Caring Canadians Award, the Canada 125 Commemorative Medal and a certificate of merit for citizenship and immigration.

I am proud to acknowledge Saro Panuccio's 50 years in Canada. I ask all members of the House to please join me in congratulating him for making our country a better place for everyone.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Svend Robinson (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the recent bombing by the U.S. and the U.K. of the Baghdad area of Iraq is another gross violation of international law that has led to more injury and deaths of innocent Iraqis.

While this illegal bombing is being condemned by many countries, including France and Germany, shamefully Canada's Liberal government makes us one of the only countries to support this outrageous attack.

Tony Blair is coming to town today. On behalf of our New Democratic caucus, I would urge the Prime Minister to let both Tony Blair and George Bush know very clearly that Canadians are appalled by these latest bombings, the ongoing bombings in the north and south, and the impact of depleted uranium.

Tell Tony Blair and George Bush that Canadians support the immediate lifting of the genocidal economic sanctions on Iraq that have killed so many innocent civilians. Act on the unanimous recommendations of the foreign affairs committee on Iraq. Let us send a clear and strong message to Tony Blair and George Bush. Let us stop bombing Iraq and lift the economic sanctions now.

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● (1410)

[Translation]

SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS

Mr. Stéphan Tremblay (Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay, BQ): Mr. Speaker, if I may, I will read a statement that comes directly from the students of Alma college and the people of Lac-Saint-Jean. It is directed to the Minister for International Trade representing the public at the summit of the Americas:

S. O. 31

That the summit of the Americas and Canada's participation in it be conditional on human rights and the environment being given priority over trade interests in the negotiations. In addition, public participation must be given greater importance.

For this to happen, the students want all negotiations to be governed by a code of ethics and subject to the universal declaration of human rights and to environmental protection in the case of all countries concerned. This will mean human, including workers' rights must be respected.

Finally, the students want the texts of the negotiations to be made public immediately.

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[English]

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for every dollar that Canadians spend on agriculture Americans spend \$2.06, Europeans spend \$2.14 and the Japanese \$3.47. The United States subsidizes farmers four times more than we do and the Europeans six times more.

A good result of this is that all Canadians spend less than 10% of their incomes on food. All other developed nations spend much more. However, a bad result is that our farmers' share of food costs is very small.

While we can be proud that we eat the healthiest food in the world at the least cost, we must think of the long term. Our wonderfully efficient farming system will be maintained only if farmers and their families receive a fair income for their efforts and ingenuity.

If today's food is too cheap we will pay the cost tomorrow. Let us be sure that our farmers receive their fair share.

* * *

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon—Souris, PC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the hon. member for Toronto—Danforth for the fine work done in organizing the Canadian family farm food and wine celebration in the Hall of Honour last night.

The reception was attended by representatives from all political parties in an effort to further advance the concerns of our farm communities across Canada here on Parliament Hill.

The reception demonstrated that the message is starting to get through to members of the government side. The overwhelming concern for the plight of our farmers has crossed party lines and at last week's emergency debate was clearly shown. The federal

government should seize the opportunity to extend a helping hand to this industry in a demonstration of goodwill.

The message from last night's reception was clear: whether members represent an urban or rural centre in Canada, we can all learn about, understand and recognize the problems the agricultural industry has faced over the past few years.

The only question that has to be asked is when will the minister of agriculture act and when will he put his words into action?

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[Translation]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mrs. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of our government's aims in international politics is to lighten the debt load of the poorest countries.

In many of the countries considered the poorest, the debt is borne by the people. At the moment, 17 of the world's most indebted countries owe Canada some \$1.1 billion. We recently declared a moratorium on the repayment of \$700 million in debt for 11 of them.

This specific action is helping make Canada one of countries most committed to reducing human suffering in the world on behalf of Canadians everywhere.

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[English]

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to rise today on behalf of the official opposition in recognition of Black History Month.

Ancestors of Canada's black community have been present in Canada for more than 300 years and have made tremendous contributions to the building of our nation, both as slaves and free men and women.

Thankfully slavery in the British Commonwealth ended on August 1, 1834. Abolitionists and others who fought against slavery, including those who arrived in Canada by the underground railroad, have recognized August 1 as Emancipation Day. I will be debating a motion on Thursday, March 1 that would proclaim August 1 as Emancipation Day in tribute to those who struggled against slavery and continue the ongoing international struggle for human rights.

I welcome the support of my colleagues for this non-partisan initiative.

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTION PERIOD**

• (1415)

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Stockwell Day (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, along with the official opposition others are also expressing concern about the government's financial plan no longer being in touch with the changing economy.

I would like to quote from the chief economist at the TD Bank. He is also the former assistant deputy minister of finance. He said of the finance minister's economic update that "the October 2000 economic statement and budget update is now outdated".

A vague commitment from the finance minister about some update some time in the spring just will not cut it. If the finance minister is not prepared to listen to concerned Canadians, to the markets, to people in business or to the official opposition, will he at least listen to his former top adviser and now a chief economist and table a budget and do it soon?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member ought to listen to the people that he is quoting. Neither Mr. Drummond nor the vast majority of other economists have said that we should be producing a budget.

They have asked for us to do an economic update to update the projections. Of course we have said on a multitude of occasions that when the consensus of private sector forecasters is ready, of which Mr. Drummond is one, it will obviously be the time to consider an update, as indeed we did last spring.

Mr. Stockwell Day (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, we have been trying to give him that consensus for days and days now, and he is not listening.

Here is another quote from Mr. Drummond, his former senior adviser: "The economic assumptions underpinning the October update now seem decidedly optimistic". He is saying these are not realistic plans.

I want to assure the finance minister that we are not blaming the downturn on him. We are not doing that. He had nothing to do with it, just like he had nothing to do with the upturn.

I am trying to impress upon him that this is an important issue. Canadians want a financial plan to know how to lessen the impact of an economic downturn. When will he table it, not some vague promise of spring?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would really like to welcome the Leader of the Opposition to the real world if he has only now discovered that there has been a

revision by most private sector forecasters that there is a slowdown going on in the United States. Well, then, welcome to reality.

The government has been saying that for quite some time. What the government has also said in terms of its own forecasts is that in the October statement we put in a contingency reserve and the prudence to cover this very kind of eventuality. In short, we have shown foresight and that Canada is the stronger for it.

Mr. Stockwell Day (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it was only last Friday that the government finally admitted we are into an economic downturn.

Let us talk about that contingency reserve. In the red book there is a reflection about revenues, with 50% going to increased spending and 50% going to taxes and debt reduction.

Since the Prime Minister wrote the red book we will not blame the finance minister. Will the Prime Minister tell us, then, what is his plan? How can we know? With revenues being reduced as they will because we are in a downturn, is he planning to reduce spending, or will he back off on debt reduction which will weaken the dollar? How can we know what he will do without a budget?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, everyone around who knows the situation is praising the government because we reduced the taxes on January 1. Everyone said that we had perfect timing in doing it at the same time as the downturn in the United States.

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I guess the finance minister still has not sent a memo to the Prime Minister pointing out that taxes are going up this year with the CPP increases.

Mr. Drummond said in the same report that the October statement "does not reflect the tax changes promised in the statement or spending commitments in red book three or the throne speech". He also said that economic assumptions in the October statement were "decidedly optimistic".

Does the finance minister agree with his comment that the assumptions are not realistic? If he does agree, what does he believe are realistic assumptions for the future of our economy?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we have every year, and opposition members have had a lot of difficulty with it because they said we were being too prudent, the assumptions that were made in the October statement were then offset by the contingency reserve and the prudence for just this kind of eventuality.

That is why we do not have to rush into an economic update. It is certainly why we do not have to rush into a budget, because in fact we have shown the foresight. I have said that when the consensus of private sector forecasters is ready we will indeed do an economic update. We did it last spring and we will do it this spring.

Oral Questions

We did it last fall and we will do another one next fall. Welcome to the real world. That is the way the government operates.

• (1420)

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, let me get this straight. A statement which did not incorporate its own tax changes or consider new spending increases in the red book showed foresight; I think not.

On Monday we learned that manufacturing was down for the second straight month. Yesterday we learned that the key composite index was down for two straight months. Today we learn that investment in machinery and equipment is down for three straight months.

With these growing clouds on the economic horizon, what plans does this finance minister have to protect Canadians and their economy from the very real prospect of a downturn?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again all I can say is: Take a look at what we have done compared to other countries.

The tax stimulus that we provided the economy in our October update, which took effect on January 1, was four times greater than that of the United Kingdom and eight times greater than those planned in the United States.

The fact is what other people are talking about doing we have already done. The fact is that we have provided for the spending.

Some hon. members: More, more.

The Speaker: Not on this answer; there is no more. If the minister is going to pause for the applause, he gives up the time.

* * *

[Translation]

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT BANK OF CANADA

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister denied in the House that Jean Carle was involved in the Auberge Grand-Mère affair.

However, a memo made public yesterday proves exactly the opposite.

Is the Prime Minister going to stick to his version and keep denying verifiable facts?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I repeat, when Mr. Carle worked for me, he had nothing to do with this loan.

When the loan was made in 1997, Mr. Carle worked for my office. He joined the bank in 1998.

So there was absolutely no involvement by Mr. Carle in this business either before or after, because the loan was made before he joined the bank in 1998.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we are not saying that Mr. Carle received a commission on the loan.

What we are saying is that a memo from Jean Carle suggests answers that could be given to journalists in order to defend the Prime Minister, who maintains that Mr. Carle was never involved in this business. This proves the contrary. The Liberals have refused that the memo be tabled.

Why is the Prime Minister maintaining the opposite of what is confirmed by verifiable facts contained in a memo he does not want to look at?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this occurred in 1997, and Mr. Carle joined the bank in 1998.

Relations between departments and crown corporations are established by the employees working in these corporations.

Mr. Carle's job was to maintain relations between the Business Development Bank of Canada and the department. Mr. Carle has absolutely nothing to do with loans, or with this loan, which was made before he joined the bank.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I wish to make my question more specific.

We are told that he has nothing to do with loans. But we are talking about the entire Auberge Grand-Mère affair. There were negotiations, there was a loan, and there was a subsequent attempt to cover up.

My question for the Prime Minister has to do with the cover-up attempt. Will he admit the verifiable facts or is he going to keep denying the evidence?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, they have been talking about this for two years. We have answered in the House time and again. I repeat that, when Mr. Carle worked for me, he had nothing to do with this loan.

When the loan was made in 1997, he worked for me. In 1998 he left my office and was hired by the Business Development Bank of Canada. The loan had already been running for a year, and it was also held by the caisse populaire and the Fonds de solidarité. There is nothing to hide. All these lenders have continued the loan for four years and the enterprise is still in operation.

• (1425)

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is ducking the questions.

Oral Questions

We are told that parliamentarians are behaving like Joe McCarthy. I think that the Prime Minister is starting to look more and more like Richard Nixon, and that is the truth.

Perhaps that is why he called an early election; to keep the truth from coming out. I call on him to have some respect for the House. Is he able to behave like an honourable person and admit that he is denying the facts?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order, please. All members of the House are honourable.

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member must have very few arguments if these are the ones to which he is resorting.

I gave the House all the details. I have nothing to hide. I have been saying the same thing for two years now and it is what I will be saying for the next two years.

* * *

[English]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the British Prime Minister will be in Ottawa tomorrow on his way to Washington to meet with President Bush.

My question is for the Prime Minister. When he sits down with Mr. Blair, will he condemn the national missile defence system? Will he make it clear that Canadians reject this proposal that would not have been acceptable even during the cold war? Will the Prime Minister tell Mr. Blair what he failed to tell Mr. Bush: do not count Canada in?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will tell Mr. Blair that it is better for him not to follow the advice of the socialists of Canada because he will be in deep trouble.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are trying to get a serious answer to serious Canadian foreign policy questions.

Germany, France and other European nations have expressed severe reservations about this nuclear missile madness. Lloyd Axworthy rejects it outright. Why can Canada not just say no to more military build up?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have discussed that with the president and I will discuss that with Mr. Blair. I want to know what the facts are first. I will have discussions with the Americans, who have decided they will not proceed if it will cause a lot of problems for NATO and if they cannot find an arrangement with the Chinese and the Russians.

It is our position that there have to be discussions with everyone and if they want to have discussions with everyone, we will not say no before the discussions take place. In discussions we have to listen first.

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BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT BANK

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Calgary Centre, PC): Mr. Speaker, on February 7 I asked the Prime Minister the following:

—whether Mr. Jean Carle was involved in any way in the Auberge Grand-Mère file, either during his tenure in the Prime Minister's Office or in his work with the Business Development Bank.

The Prime Minister replied "The answer is no". Was the Prime Minister's statement to the House of Commons on February 7 the truth?

The Speaker: The hon. member for Calgary Centre may repeat the question he asked before, but asking it in the way he has asked it is marginally in order at best. I suspect it is out of order. I am going to allow the Prime Minister to answer and I will treat it as a repeat of the previous question.

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what I said in the House of Commons was the truth and I will repeat what I said to the leader of the Bloc Québécois.

The loan was made in 1997. Mr. Carle was working with me and was not involved in the file. He joined the bank in 1998, so he had absolutely nothing to do with this loan to Auberge Grand-Mère. That was a loan not only from the bank, but from the caisse populaire and from Le Fonds de solidarité des travailleurs du Québec. This loan was made in 1997 and the loan is still in operation after four years.

● (1430)

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Calgary Centre, PC): Mr. Speaker, the question was not about the loan. The question was about whether Mr. Jean Carle was involved in any way in this file. The Prime Minister cannot pass this off to Pinocchio. He has to answer this himself.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order, please. The House will hear the question of the right hon. member for Calgary Centre.

Right Hon. Joe Clark: Mr. Speaker, was Mr. Jean Carle involved in any way in any of the transactions related to Auberge Grand-Mère? Is the answer to the question asked on February 7 the same, or is the Prime Minister changing his position?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Jean Carle was never involved in the loan by the Business Development Bank. The leader of the opposition has just said that he has nothing against the loan.

Oral Questions

The problem the leader of not the opposition has, who will never come back as leader of the opposition, is that it is pure jealousy. This government, for almost eight years, had no scandals while he was in an administration that had one every month.

Miss Deborah Grey (Edmonton North, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, in fact there are a couple of questions that arise from the loan itself, and I would like to bring them up.

We have obtained an internal memo from the Business Development Bank that details the very loan to the Auberge Grand-Mère. I will quote from that document. It states:

—the global risk for BDC is very high. We are aware that the financing structure recommended does not meet the normal policy and criteria of the bank.

Is that why the Prime Minister has not been entirely, shall we say, forthcoming with the House? That is the memo.

The Speaker: Once again, I am concerned about the tone of the questions. Hon. members know there are rules in the House concerning these questions. I urge all hon. members to show proper and judicious use of their words in asking questions.

Hon. Brian Tobin (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what is not forthcoming is the posing with four-legged animals outside parliament complaining about parliamentary pensions and then grabbing one right after the election is over. That is not professional.

Miss Deborah Grey (Edmonton North, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about the BDC memo which says very clearly—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order, please. I know it is Wednesday. Hon. members, we are losing a lot of time. The hon. member for Edmonton North has the floor.

Miss Deborah Grey: Mr. Speaker, it is pretty sad over there no matter what day of the week it is.

The BDC memo concerns loans to the Grand-Mère of \$415,000. What did it end up getting? It got \$600,000.

Let us look at this. A bank is very worried about lending a large sum of money so it first ignores its normal procedures, it increases the loan by 50% extra and then it hands over the cash. I would love the Prime Minister to call my bank when it is time to renew my mortgage.

I want to ask, is this a shady loan or is it the fact that he arranged it?

The Speaker: I am not sure I heard a question but I think the right hon. Prime Minister will reply.

The hon. member for Edmonton North will pose her question directly.

Miss Deborah Grey: She surely will, Mr. Speaker. Is it the shady nature of that bank loan or is it the fact that he arranged it that prevents the Prime Minister from answering?

Hon. Brian Tobin (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the facts are pretty clear. The facts are that we have had a request by the Leader of the Opposition directly to the ethics counsellor for an investigation. That has now occurred and a definitive answer has been given saying that the Prime Minister of Canada was in no conflict and has complied with the ethics rules.

Then we had two letters from the leader of the Conservative Party to the RCMP. Surely all Canadians can agree that the RCMP are objective and professional. It did an investigation that said there was no need for a further investigation. Then the leader of the Conservative Party wants to coach the RCMP on how to be policemen.

This matter is ridiculous and—

• (1435)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Joliette.

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[Translation]

FREE TRADE AREA OF THE AMERICAS

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister for International Trade has said time and again that Canada's position was that culture, health and education would never be included in the negotiations on the free trade area of the Americas.

Could the minister confirm today that Canada's position is still the same and that our country will never accept that these issues be negotiated under the free trade area of the Americas?

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister for International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as regards culture, we have done some very important work, along with the Minister of Canadian Heritage, to develop a different way of treating cultural products. We feel it is important that these products not be subjected to standard trade legislation.

As for the other issues, namely health and education, I have always made it very clear that Canada would never allow negotiations on its right to have its own systems and its own way of doing things in these most important areas.

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, since we do not have access to the basic texts to be used in the negotiations, could the minister give us today the assurance that none of these issues are on the agenda of the negotiations on the free trade area of the Americas?

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister for International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is what I just did in a very clear manner.

We intend to keep working with our colleagues from the hemisphere and to conclude, through negotiations other than those on the FTAA, agreements on the environment. Environment ministers will meet in preparation for the summit in Quebec City. We will also have meetings with labour ministers, who are holding their own talks. In early April international trade ministers will negotiate in Buenos Aires the extensions and the integration of the free trade area of the Americas.

* * *

[English]

GRANTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Ms. Val Meredith (South Surrey—White Rock—Langley, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, last April, when we enquired about grants to the Strathroy Community Resource Centre, the parliamentary secretary not only defended the grants but attacked us for even questioning them.

As it turns out, we had every reason to be concerned. Last Thursday the police announced that fraud charges were going to be laid against three members of the board.

I ask the minister: Why was the government defending these grants instead of protecting taxpayer money from criminal misuse?

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we have always said, whenever there were allegations of wrongdoing in circumstances involving government money we took them seriously. The department did ask the police to investigate. The hon. member is correct, the OPP have laid charges against three individuals. This is before the courts and, as such, I will say no more on the case.

Ms. Val Meredith (South Surrey—White Rock—Langley, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it is apparent that the minister really does not know what is going on in her department. The HRDC performance report states that last year's audit of grants and contributions found "that no money was found to be missing".

This is quite interesting given that there are at least 20 police investigations into the grants and contributions program.

If no money is missing, as the minister claims, can she then explain to the House why there are these police investigations and why they are laying fraud charges on the files?

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what is absolutely clear is that the vast majority of investments made by the government in communities right across the country, including investments in the hon. member's own riding, have made a difference in the lives of Canadians.

Oral Questions

I respect, from time to time, that there are allegations made about wrongdoings. We always take them seriously. If investigations are required, they are undertaken and action is followed.

* * *

[Translation]

ORGANIZED CRIME

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, a United Nations agency has criticized Canada's lack of action against the illegal cultivation of cannabis and its inability to properly control the production of synthetic drugs. I too have called upon the solicitor general here in this House to take action on the gangs terrorizing farmers, but with no satisfactory response.

Could the solicitor general tell us why he has turned a deaf ear to my entreaties for the past two years and could he tell us, in light of such a damning report, what action he intends to take so that farm families will no longer fall victim to gang threats?

• (1440)

[English]

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as my hon. colleague is personally well aware, the RCMP supports the SQ, which leads the investigations in Quebec.

We support federal, provincial and municipal police forces across the country and we will continue to do so to fight organized crime.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is not a matter of support, but one of resources. Resources are insufficient, as he well knows. We are not the ones saying it this time, the UN is.

Now that the laxity of the government is being criticized on the international level, is the solicitor general going to finally tell us what action he intends to take against drug traffickers and what protection he intends to provide to these farm families, who have had enough of his promises?

[English]

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think my hon. colleague is well aware that in the last budget the government committed \$1.5 billion to the public safety envelope, which is something that is very important.

We give the RCMP and other police organizations across this country the tools to do the job, like CPIC and many other tools.

*Oral Questions***IMMIGRATION**

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, Canadian Tamils are law-abiding good people but in any group there are a few bad apples.

Right now the Department of Citizenship and Immigration lawyers are arguing at the supreme court to have a man deported because of his association with FACT, a group they say is a fundraising front for the Tamil Tigers.

Last year the finance minister and the CIDA ministers argued there was nothing wrong with attending a FACT fundraiser.

Will the immigration minister confirm that FACT is indeed a terrorist front and that her cabinet colleagues should not be out raising money for them?

Hon. Elinor Caplan (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member knows full well that it is completely inappropriate to discuss matters that are before the Supreme Court of Canada.

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, Canadian Alliance): Especially, Mr. Speaker, when her neck is on the line.

In their case before the supreme court, the Department of Citizenship and Immigration lawyers flat out say that FACT is a fundraising front for the Tamil Tigers. They go on to say that the Tigers "raise money through drug trafficking and by relying upon the willing or unwilling expatriate communities abroad, such as the large number of Tamil refugees in Canada".

That is what her own lawyers have said.

How can the minister deny that her cabinet colleagues were in fact raising funds for a terrorist front?

The Speaker: Before the minister answers, the question had to do with whether ministers were raising money for other purposes. It has nothing to do with the responsibilities of the government and I am inclined to rule the question out of order.

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[Translation]

WATER QUALITY

Mr. Claude Duplain (Portneuf, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with respect to the problem facing the people of Shannon and contrary to the allegations of certain Bloc Quebecois members, we have been working together with the various parties since this matter was raised.

I would direct my question to the Minister of National Defence. In the light of recent press releases by the Quebec minister of the environment on the quality of the water in Shannon, could the minister tell us what role his department is playing in this matter and how he intends to reassure the people of Shannon?

[English]

Hon. Art Eggleton (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my top concern and the top concern of the government is the health and welfare of the people in this community, the people on our base and the people in the surrounding communities. I hope the Quebec government will make that its priority as well.

Since discovering this matter and since bringing it to the attention of the provincial government back in April 1998, we have spent over \$2 million in terms of doing studies, doing research as to the source of the problems and taking remedial action. We will continue to do that. We want to continue to co-operate with all officials, provincial and local, to make sure that the health of the people in this area is looked after.

* * *

PHARMACEUTICALS

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the government introduced significant and far-reaching legislation extending patent protection for many brand name drugs, which will add enormously to the cost of drugs already going through the roof.

Interestingly, the government chose not to introduce this bill in this House but chose the other place.

The question today is really why this cave in to the WTO and why in fact the Senate? Are the Liberals ashamed of the fact that they are bringing in legislation to conform to an idea which they had previously condemned?

• (1445)

Hon. Brian Tobin (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the legislation which I sponsored is being dealt with in the other place because of its ability to deal efficiently with legislation. It will move over here at the appropriate time.

With respect to the package of amendments, they are in compliance with the ruling of the WTO. Canada always seeks to be in compliance with WTO rulings.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that just before the federal election, in response to the WTO ruling, the government said all options were on the table, including non-compliance.

Today the government is prepared to roll over and play dead. The patients, the seniors and the provincial health systems will pay the price.

Since the government has obviously decided to cave in to the WTO, we want to know what the government is prepared to do to address the high price of drugs. Is it at least prepared to eliminate the automatic injunction against generic competition?

Oral Questions

Hon. Brian Tobin (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is no evidence whatsoever to support the notion that the cost of drugs in Canada will increase dramatically in the fashion being proposed by the member as a result of complying with the WTO. We will continue to still see many people from south of the border taking buses across the border to try and access cheaper drugs in this country.

The hon. member and the NDP cannot be serious in suggesting that Canada alone in the world should decide to create some kind of survivor society completely outside international trade rules. We intend to respect those rules because we have done very well in the world of trade.

* * *

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT BANK

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Calgary Centre, PC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is dodging on Jean Carle. Let me ask him whether he stands by his assertion in his letter to *The National Post* on April 10, 1999, in which he said “I therefore had no direct or indirect personal connection with the hotel in question or with the adjacent golf course”.

If the Prime Minister stands by that statement, will he agree to table all relevant documents respecting his attempt to sell shares in the Grand-Mère golf course to Akimbo Development Corporation?

Hon. Brian Tobin (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the facts are these. In 1997 when this loan was approved, the gentleman in question, Mr. Jean Carle, was employed on Parliament Hill in the Prime Minister’s Office. He was not anywhere near BDC at the time. In 1998 he was employed at BDC.

Yesterday the leader of that opposition party said that he was quoting from a document from the Prime Minister’s Office. I have actually examined it. It is not a document from the Prime Minister’s Office. It is a document prepared by the BDC. Insofar as Mr. Carle is concerned, he is the vice-president—

The Speaker: I am sorry to interrupt the member, but we do have time limits in the House.

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LUMBER INDUSTRY

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester, PC): Mr. Speaker, I just sent a letter over to the Prime Minister from the four Atlantic premiers requesting renewal of the softwood lumber agreement and specifically the maritime accord. In the letter they said “Failure to continue the current agreement and arrangements would have a devastating impact on our region’s softwood lumber industry”.

I was surprised a week ago when the parliamentary secretary rose in the House and said “the government is very clear that

nobody in Canada wants to see the current deal extended”. I would say that was little disrespectful of the premiers.

Would the Prime Minister confirm that he understands the request of the four premiers? Would he commit to act on this request by the four premiers?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is a very important file for all provinces because softwood lumber is an extremely important commodity which Canada exports to the United States. It was one of the first items I mentioned to the president when I met him two weeks ago.

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AGRICULTURE

Mr. Howard Hilstrom (Selkirk—Interlake, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, last night farmers continued their efforts to get the government to finally pay attention to the farm income crisis through a banquet in the Hall of Honour. The purpose of this banquet was to demand an all day debate on the issue of farmers receiving adequate returns for their investment and labour.

The Liberal rural caucus seems to support this debate. We have heard nothing from cabinet. Will the government hold this debate as demanded by farmers? If so, when will it be done?

● (1450)

Hon. Lyle Vanclief (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the farmers across Canada and everyone in the House I thank the hon. member for Toronto—Danforth for organizing the event last night.

It continues to point out the need for support from the government to Canadian farmers. The government has been there for farmers in the past and will continue to be there for them.

Mr. Howard Hilstrom (Selkirk—Interlake, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the farmers up there in the stands do not want platitudes. They do not want banquets. They want action, and they want it today.

The government has had three years to take care of the farm crisis in the country, and I guarantee it is a crisis. What has the minister done? We have farmers coming here with combines and machinery. They are protesting on the Hill and inside the House. When will he do something to get some money to farmers now?

Hon. Lyle Vanclief (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am glad the event took place last night because it is the first question on this issue from the opposition for two weeks.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Oral Questions

The Speaker: Order, please. The Chair wants to hear the answer of the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food.

Hon. Lyle Vanclief: Mr. Speaker, while opposition members have been asking questions on other issues, the government has been working on this issue. We have in the past and will continue to do so in the future. We will be there for farmers with all the resources we can possibly muster.

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[Translation]

PARENTAL LEAVE

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, entitlement under the parental leave program of the federal government for women eligible for employment insurance discriminates against women who give birth prematurely.

My question is for the Minister of Human Resources Development. Is the minister prepared to amend Bill C-2 to treat these women fairly and enable them to enjoy extended parental leave?

[English]

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we on this side of the House are very proud of our undertaking to double parental benefits. The new program came into place at the end of the year 2000 as we promised.

As is the question whenever changes are made, there has to be a date of commencement. We undertook discussions with Canadians. We had to talk with the provinces and territories. We had to create legislation. We set the date for the end of the year 2000 as we promised. We are very glad that on a go forward basis all parents will have access to the program.

[Translation]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, does the minister realize that, if she agreed finally to negotiate with the government of Quebec to enable it to establish its own parental leave program, the program would be far less prejudicial to women?

[English]

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, as we have always said, we have expanded the parental benefit by doubling it in a very significant way. If the province of Quebec wishes to add to that program, we would encourage it to do so.

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PUBLIC SERVICE

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, today brings more troubling evidence of the

lengths to which the government will go to sacrifice Canada's impartial public service if it does not willingly go along with the Liberal self-serving political agenda.

A Health Canada scientist has been punished and her paycheque taken away for two weeks. Her crime was being honest enough to confirm the Brazilian beef ban was not based on scientific evidence but was a pretext to escalate a trade war.

Why is there this blatant intimidation of a public servant who dares to step out of the official line?

Hon. Herb Gray (Deputy Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I should remind the House that the individual in question was not working on this file. This was not within her area of responsibility in the health department. She was not an employee of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

● (1455)

This individual has available to her a full grievance procedure and eventually, if she wants, recourse through the courts. She is represented by her union. Under the circumstances I think it is appropriate to confirm that ordinarily ministers and members are not involved in these types of public service decisions.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, this scientist has just fought a Health Canada gag order and won, but the government continues its efforts to shut her down from telling Canadians the truth.

Canadians are unable to feel secure when examples pile up of our public servants being prevented from telling the truth and being made political pawns of the government. Why does the government have to go to such extreme lengths to keep citizens from knowing what is really going on?

Hon. Herb Gray (Deputy Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, senior officials who are directly connected with the file, veterinary scientists and officials of the health department linked with the file are giving full information.

She mentioned a court case. I understand the fact situation is different. I also remind her that these types of matters which involve employees are not matters where ministers of the government are directly involved. However, the official in question has recourse to a full grievance procedure. I am sure she is aware of her rights in that regard.

* * *

TRADE

Mr. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister for International Trade. It has now been 119 days since the United States took unwarranted and illegal trade action by closing the border to P.E.I. potatoes. We have proven scientifically

that this product is safe to export, yet the border remains closed and our warehouses are full.

It is time to be aggressive. What action is the minister prepared to pursue with the Americans to have them open the border so our products can get back in the marketplace?

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister for International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me first thank all my colleagues from P.E.I. who have been very active on this file on behalf of potato growing constituents.

The Prime Minister raised the issue with President Bush. When my colleague, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, was in Washington yesterday he raised it with his colleague from the United States. I will be raising the P.E.I. potato issue with Bob Zoellick, the United States trade representative, when I meet with him on Monday.

Our government is taking this issue to the highest level. Canada will not stand for protectionism by the back door.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Art Hanger (Calgary Northeast, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the minister supported the reduced flying hours for Aurora aircraft pilots by claiming that simulators would make up for the lost time.

He was dead wrong on that assessment. A phone call this morning from Canadian Forces Base Greenwood to my office revealed that the simulators there are more than 30 years old and do not even reflect an Aurora cockpit. Moreover, simulation training is not as effective as flying. In what way does using an outdated simulator protect Canada's borders?

Hon. Art Eggleton (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as usual the Canadian Alliance is out of date on its research. Yesterday it talked about a letter which is almost two years old. Today it is talking about old equipment. The government is investing in new equipment, new simulators, new sensors, new upgrading and technologically advanced equipment.

Within the last hour I talked with the chief of the air staff. He fully supports the recommendation that is being made. He assures me that we will not compromise the security of Canada's coastline.

Mr. Art Hanger (Calgary Northeast, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the chief of the air force would probably be fired if he did not agree with the minister.

The minister said that the reduced Aurora flying hours were justified because it was a case of quality versus quantity. Thanks to

Oral Questions

the Liberal government, when it comes to equipment we do not have either. Would the minister tell the House how sitting in a simulator is quality border patrol?

Hon. Art Eggleton (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there will not be any reduction in terms of the operations on the coastline. This comes from the chief of the air staff. It is bottom up, not top down. We in fact will maintain the kind of service that we have provided. The integrity of the service will be maintained. We are investing in new equipment. We are investing almost \$1 billion in the upgrading of the Aurora equipment to act in a proper fashion in terms of our surveillance capability.

* * *

• (1500)

[Translation]

U.S. MISSILE DEFENCE SHIELD

Ms. Francine Lalonde (Mercier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on the important issue of the U.S. missile defence shield, the Prime Minister recently said in China that "It could cause all sorts of disruptions, but that then again it could lead to a solution. We will see".

My question is for the Prime Minister, and I hope he will elaborate further than he did earlier. If it turns out that the U.S. missile defence shield causes all sorts of disruptions, to use the Prime Minister's words, including a renewed international arms race, will the Prime Minister strongly oppose this project?

Hon. John Manley (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is a hypothetical question, because so far the United States has said that it would discuss the issue with its allies and also with the Russians and the Chinese. This is only normal. However, there is no specific plan at this point.

So, it may be that the hon. member is speculating on something that may never occur.

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[English]

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of His Excellency Dr. Khaled Toukan, Minister of Education, and His Excellency Dr. Fawaz Zu'bi, Minister of Post and Communications of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

*Points of Order***PRIVILEGE**

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Hon. Maria Minna (Minister for International Cooperation, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during question period the member for Medicine Hat referred to both myself and the Minister of Finance and said that we had attended a terrorist dinner or function and that we support terrorists.

We attended a community event.

When he says things like that, he is painting members of the Tamil community as a whole as terrorists.

I attended a community event that was made up of respectable Canadian citizens. I did not attend or have dinner with a group of terrorists.

I take this as an offence and I ask for an apology. I do not support terrorism and neither does my colleague. That is absolutely unacceptable.

The Speaker: From time to time some hon. members of the House say things that may cause some offence to some other hon. members. I think the member has made a point here that has clarified the situation, insofar as she is concerned, under the guise of a question of privilege.

It is more in the nature of a grievance than a question of privilege. While the Chair is sympathetic and has allowed the hon. member to perhaps make her point, and she has made it, as I say, I do not believe that her privileges as a member have been infringed as a result of what the hon. member for Medicine Hat may have said. I do not think that what he has said is contrary to the rules of the House.

We have a disagreement here on an interpretation of what the nature of this meeting was. The hon. member has expressed his view. The hon. minister has disagreed with that point of view. I think we will leave it at that. I do not think there is anything the Chair can say that will change that situation. Accordingly, I am declining to deal with it.

• (1505)

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is difficult to understand how there can be a valid difference of opinion as to the nature of the meeting given the fact that the minister and I were there and the hon. member was not.

That is not the issue. The other part of the issue is that it is alleged that we support terrorism and fundraising activities for terrorism. That is clearly not the fact. It not only besmirches us, it besmirches the entire Tamil community, but it is our own privileges that we are raising this.

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I simply have to bring some clarity to this situation.

During question period I certainly did not suggest in any way that the Minister of Finance and the minister for CIDA knowingly supported this group.

What I am alleging is simply that the department of immigration, CSIS and other government organizations have pointed to the fact that FACT is a front for a terrorist organization. I argue that both ministers should have known that as they are cabinet members and that they should renounce that group that they in fact unknowingly supported.

The Speaker: It seems to me that we have cleared the air on what was alleged and what was understood. Again I have trouble relating this to a strict question in terms of privileges of members, which hon. members can read about in our wonderful book on procedure that is available at the table, Marleau and Montpetit. There is an excellent chapter in there on privilege.

In fact, the hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader himself has published a book dealing with issues relating to parliamentary privilege, which is of course a masterpiece. We could all benefit from looking at those.

However, I have not heard anything in the exchanges today that has assisted the Chair in finding that there is in fact a question of privilege. There is a grievance and the grievance has been aired. There has been some clarification. Perhaps we ought to leave it.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Mr. Werner Schmidt (Kelowna, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I would ask you to please clarify the reasons why you would not allow my S. O. 31 statement.

I would respectfully submit that I did not in any way intend it to be a personal attack on any member in the House but rather to take the very words that the ethics counsellor himself used about the Prime Minister, saying that he was no ordinary MP. It was within that context that these particular words were put together.

I did provide you, Mr. Speaker, with the text of what I was about to submit to the House. I would ask if you would please clarify what it is about that statement that you considered to be a personal attack on a member of the House.

The Speaker: I will not read the hon. member's statement to the House. What I will read to him are the guidelines that are set out on page 363 of Marleau and Montpetit:

In presiding over the conduct of this daily activity,—

This is the daily activity of Standing Order 31 statements.

—Speakers have been guided by a number of well-defined prohibitions. In 1983, when the procedure for “Statements by Members” was first put in place, Speaker Sauvé stated that

Members may speak on any matter of concern and not necessarily on urgent matters only;

Personal attacks are not permitted;

Congratulatory messages, recitations of poetry and frivolous matters are out of order.

These guidelines are still in place today, although Speakers tend to turn a blind eye to the latter restriction.

I’ll say.

In a ruling in 1996, Mr. Speaker Parent further cautioned that “once they”, the words, “have been uttered, it is very difficult to retract them and the impression they leave is not always easily erased”. Accordingly, the Chair errs on the side of caution in making rulings in respect of statements by members.

In this particular case, the hon. member for Kelowna has provided me with a copy of his statement that he was in the process of reading. I have to say that when I read the whole statement I have no doubt that my decision was correct.

• (1510)

It appears to me that it was in my view a personal attack. Statements by members are not ones that can be responded to. If members are going to attack one another in statements by members, there is no opportunity for anyone else to comment. Question period is a different kettle of fish. There is question and answer, there is give and take, but in a statement by members there is not.

The Chair is not prepared to countenance members rising on the guise of those statements and attacking one another in the House. There is enough opportunity to do that at other times. It is not going to happen under statements by members.

In my view the hon. member for Kelowna stepped over the line in his statement. Having read the entire statement, I have no doubt I was correct.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Mr. Howard Hilstrom (Selkirk—Interlake, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, in question period today in answer to my question in regard to agriculture, the agriculture minister saw fit to cast aspersions on the Canadian Alliance and me with the idea of our not having asked any questions or participated in any activity in agriculture in the House. That is not true. We have had over eight questions and dozens of statements and speeches. I believe the agriculture minister should retract that.

Routine Proceedings

The Speaker: Once again we are in a situation where members say things on which there is disagreement. I do not know how this could be a point of order.

The hon. member and the minister clearly have a disagreement. I know that the minister seemed, in his answer, to disagree with the member’s statement that nothing had been done. These disagreements are commonplace on issues of policy in the House.

While the hon. member may not like the answer the minister gave, I sense the minister was not entirely happy with the question either. That is sometimes the way things are and we all have to live with it. I do not think there is a point of order here.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

ORDER IN COUNCIL APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Derek Lee (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table, in both official languages, a number of order in council appointments recently made by the government.

Pursuant to the provisions of Standing Order 110(1) they are deemed to be referred to the appropriate standing committee, a list of which is attached.

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GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Derek Lee (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government’s response to two petitions.

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INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. Bryon Wilfert (Oak Ridges, Lib.) Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34 I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the report of the delegation of the Canada-Japan Interparliamentary Group to the ninth annual meeting of the Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Forum in Valparaiso, Chile, January 14 to January 19, 2001.

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IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE PROTECTION ACT

Hon. Elinor Caplan (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-11, an act respecting immigration to Canada and the granting of refugee protection to persons who are displaced, persecuted or in danger.

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

Routine Proceedings

[Translation]

JUDGES ACT

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-12, an act to amend the Judges Act and to amend another Act in consequence.

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

* * *

[English]

PARLIAMENT OF CANADA ACT

Mr. Jim Pankiw (Saskatoon—Humboldt, Canadian Alliance) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-273, an act to amend the Parliament of Canada Act (recognized political parties).

He said: Mr. Speaker, this bill would provide that in order to receive official party status a political party would need at least 10% of the seats in the House of Commons and members of parliament from at least three provinces or territories.

● (1515)

The bill would therefore prevent fringe parties such as the Progressive Conservative Party and the NDP, with only 4% of the seats in the House of Commons, from receiving the benefit of financial resources that come with the distinction of official party status.

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

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CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-274, an act to amend the Criminal Code (Order of prohibition).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I have a bill that I think has a little more substance than the last one.

It refers to a section of the criminal code, currently section 161, which deals with an offender convicted of a sexual offence. The enactment would permit the court to make a prohibition for the offender from being in a dwelling house where the offender knows or ought to know that a person under the age of 14 is present without being in the custody or control of a person also of that age.

In essence what the bill will do is allow judges to currently expand the umbrella of protection when putting in place prohibition orders for those who have been convicted of a sexual offence.

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

* * *

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-275, an act to amend the Criminal Code (recruitment of children and swarming).

He said: Mr. Speaker, once again, this bill pertains to the criminal code in its current form. I introduced the bill in the last parliament.

It would essentially amend the criminal code to include a provision that would make it illegal to elicit or recruit children to commit criminal offences.

It would also put in place a new provision of the criminal code which would prohibit the offence of swarming, which is an offence that is sadly becoming increasingly prevalent in a number of communities around the country.

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

* * *

COMPETITION ACT

Mr. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Ajax—Uxbridge, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-276, an act to amend the Competition Act (abuse of dominant position).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am please to reintroduce a bill dealing with changes to the Competition Act, most specifically section 78 dealing with abuse of dominance.

Recently growing consolidation and concentration throughout a variety of industries, most specifically in the retail sector, have led to a number of abuses, particularly of suppliers. Currently the Competition Act deals with the notion and the concept of monopoly and oligopoly but does not deal with the more technical question of oligopsony or monopsony.

As a result the bill would provide more teeth to the Competition Act to ensure that items such as high listing fees, trade allowances, et cetera, would be prohibited and would have, at least in their purpose, result or the intent, a competitive and a less harmful outcome for consumers and Canadians as a whole.

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

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[Translation]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSEHUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT AND STATUS OF PERSONS WITH
DISABILITIES

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ) moved:

That it be an instruction to the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development that it have the power to divide Bill C-2, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act and the Employment Insurance (Fishing) Regulations, in order that all questions related to the establishment of the premium rate and to Employment Insurance surplus management be in a separate piece of legislation.

• (1520)

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today to speak to my motion that is supported by all the opposition parties. At committee stage, this motion would divide Bill C-2, an act to amend the Employment Insurance Act, into two separate bills.

There have previously been two precedents in the House for this type of motion. In fact, the House of Commons Procedure and Practice stipulates the following:

Once a bill has been referred to a committee—

That is the case.

—the House may give the committee an instruction which authorizes it to do what it otherwise could not do, such as, for example, examining a portion of a bill and reporting it separately, examining certain items in particular, dividing a bill into more than one bill—

Our motion does exactly that.

Bill C-2 brings to our EI plan some of the improvements the Bloc Québécois has been demanding for several years now. However, these changes are minor compared to the EI surplus, which could have been used to improve the plan.

Under Bill C-2, only about 8% of annual surpluses will be given back to workers, to the unemployed, while 92% of these surpluses will continue to be used to cover other government expenditures, including the debt. The money used for all that will come from the contributions paid by employers and workers, but particularly from the benefits that the unemployed will not receive.

This part of the bill is aimed at legalizing the fact that EI contributions are no longer insurance premiums but rather a new payroll tax. This should be the subject of a separate debate, different from the one on improvements to the plan.

The proposal I brought forward is supported by the three opposition parties. Indeed, those parties made very eloquent presentations at a press conference, the purpose of which was to show that, even though all parties do not share the same views on ways of improving the plan, it is possible to have similar objectives.

The Canadian Alliance's views on ways of improving the plan may be very different from ours or from those of the New Democratic Party or the Progressive Conservative Party, but we share the same position with regard to the fact that, by hiding a provision in a bill, the government will legalize the misappropriation of surpluses in the EI fund, something it has been doing for several years. This issue cannot be dealt with at the same time as improvements to the plan.

This is why we are asking the House to mandate the committee to study both issues separately. This afternoon, the committee will hear the human resources development minister, who will have to justify her bill, especially since, during the whole electoral campaign, liberal members have said that the system could be improved some more at the committee stage. I think of the members for Bourassa and for Gaspé—Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Pabok in particular. They were saying that, in committee, improvements other than the ones included in the former Bill C-44, and which are still not found in Bill C-2, could be made.

If we want the committee to give appropriate time to the priority consideration of improvements to the system, I propose this motion which involves the study by the committee of the issue of improvements so that more improvements can be made since Bill C-2 only contains a few.

I am sure that those who will appear before this committee will tell us that these improvements are far from being enough and that many others will have to be added to the government's propositions to broaden eligibility for EI benefits, to eliminate the qualifying period and to ensure that seasonal workers' status is not dependant upon the economic situation in their region and that they are guaranteed a decent income between jobs.

Therefore, all issues concerning the transformation of EI premiums into a payroll tax scheme should be the subject of another debate at a later date.

At that time, the whole issue of tax reform could be raised. We should not forget that the way EI premiums are currently taxed represents a very regressive tax because anyone who earns up to \$39,000 has to contribute.

That means that someone earning \$43,000, \$44,000 or \$50,000 a year does not contribute on income over that limit. EI contributors are the ones contributing to the elimination of the deficit and to the reduction of Canada's debt, not those earning over \$39,000 or, even worse, those who do not contribute to the EI scheme at all, including members of parliament.

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• (1525)

A broad public debate is going on about the whole issue of tax reform, an issue that ought to be discussed elsewhere, for example in a joint committee bringing together members of the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and members of the Standing Committee on Finance. It is a much broader issue that is changing the balance between income tax, taxes and payroll tax and their impact on productivity. Those are very distinct elements.

Therefore, I call on the members of the House to debate that issue and to pass this motion. I hope that the Liberal majority will show an open mind and let us debate that matter today.

[*English*]

Mr. Derek Lee (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, from time to time the House has to deal with complex bills. Often they have issues that deal with separate items in a policy envelope. I really do not understand why the member opposite and his party want to split the bill when, from the point of view of this member anyway, the bill seems to be so positive and so directed at remedying apparent defects in the employment insurance system.

I do not understand why they would not wish to pursue the bill as a package. I would ask the hon. member to explain why there are not enough good things in the bill and why he and his party feel it necessary to split the bill.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête: Mr. Speaker, I think the question of the parliamentary secretary is very relevant. The answer was given in the newspapers the very evening of the debate on our proposal, which was supported by all opposition parties.

The Conseil du patronat du Québec, which is not comprised of unionized people, would like a separate debate on the whole issue of payroll taxes, because employers have been contributing to the employment insurance program for a long time and in a disproportionate way, considering the program that we have.

In a private insurance program, whatever it may be, there is a balance between premiums and the benefits paid out. If there is a major surplus, premiums are usually reduced or the terms of the program are improved for the employees, in the case of employment insurance, among other things.

In this case, why should we divide this bill in two and examine each part separately? Because, through this bill, the government is appropriating a right. It is legalizing the fact that it has been misappropriating the employment insurance surpluses. This is not insignificant, we are talking about \$30 billion. This is money that was paid by employers and employees to fund the employment

insurance program but was used to fund other types of government spending, including Canada's debt payment.

Certainly, Canada's debt has to be reduced, but this battle must not be fought only at the expense of people who contribute to the employment insurance program, because that would reinforce the regressive nature of the legislation.

This is the main reason why the bill must be split in two for consideration. The motion calls for the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development to examine the improvements to the plan first, and to report to the House on that part of the bill first. The standing committee could also choose to report on the second part, which could be the subject matter of another bill, but it is unacceptable that the government should try to pull the wool over our eyes with a nice little package.

The government is playing the game of saying, on the one hand, that it is going to abolish the intensity rule, something the Bloc has advocated for several years. This represents about \$300 million. On the other hand, it will legalize the misappropriation of funds by a vote that will enable it to dig out of our pockets \$6 billion a year and use that money for all sorts of expenses, including paying down the debt. Those who contribute to the plan are people who earn \$39,000 a year or less.

Why should we not ask that those who contributed to the elimination of the deficit by being unemployed now reap the benefits, just like the taxpayers are being rewarded by tax cuts for their contribution to the elimination of the deficit?

• (1530)

Some workers, more particularly seasonal workers, whose status is precarious, do not pay huge amounts in taxes. What they need is decent employment insurance benefits.

Mr. Michel Guimond (Beauport—Montmorency—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île-d'Orléans, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like my colleague from Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, which, by the way, is the riding with the longest name in Canada, to reassure the House and to inform our listeners that the Bloc Québécois is not against improvements to the intensity rule. He said very clearly that this is something the Bloc has been calling for, for several years now.

I would like him to give more details on why he is asking that the bill be divided because, if the bill is passed without amendment, it will open the door to ill intentioned persons, particularly on the government side. The government could say "You from the Bloc were opposed to improvements to EI. You were against them".

It would be too easy later on to use a bill with clauses on such a wide variety of subjects as an excuse to indulge in demagoguery. For that reason, I would like my colleague to repeat that the Bloc Québécois is in favour of increasing benefits for workers who have had to take large cuts since the government's first reforms in 1994.

Mr. Paul Crête: Mr. Speaker, even before Bill C-2 was introduced, we had submitted a proposal to the government to have two separate bills.

We said we were willing to dispose very quickly of the issue of improvements to the plan. Even before an election was called, when this bill was known as Bill C-44, I remember asking the Prime Minister in the House if we could vote right away on improvements to the plan, excluding the provision enabling the government to divert for its own purposes the employment insurance fund surplus.

Our attitude has not changed. This afternoon in committee we will hear from the minister. We will ask her questions, but we hope that this bill can be passed as soon as possible, as far as improvements to the plan are concerned.

Yesterday in committee we decided to make a list of witnesses who could be invited to appear. Within 24 hours, we came up with a list of 30 or so groups and organizations that wanted to be heard. The committee will begin its deliberations immediately after the visit of the British Prime Minister, Mr. Blair, on Thursday, and next week hearings will begin.

We are willing to proceed very rapidly. However, we are hearing from people with very different opinions, including not only the Conseil du patronat du Québec, but also unemployed workers advocacy groups, which know full well that seasonal workers need the money they will get from the elimination of the intensity rule and they need it quickly. However, they also agree with the Mouvement autonome et solidaire des sans-emploi that this bill, if passed as is, will not really deal with the fact that we have a surplus of billions of dollars.

At the same time, we have young people, women and seasonal workers who are not eligible to EI because of the government's greed. The government wants to use the money to fill up the coffers pay down the debt and pay its expenses, but not give adequate EI benefits.

Yes, we do want the improvements to be passed as soon as possible, because we have been asking for them for several years now. In the last few years, we have introduced about a dozen bills to improve the EI plan. The Liberals have picked two or three of our ideas, but there is still a lot of room for improvement. Let us put our time, our energy, the work of our committee and the ability of all members to good use.

I especially ask for the support of the Liberal members who, throughout the election campaign, kept saying that the plan would be changed after the election and that it would greatly benefit all

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Canadians because it would be made fairer. So far, these commitments have not been added to old Bill C-44.

So, to answer my colleague, I say that yes, it is true, we have to focus all our energy, and as soon as possible, on restoring some value to the plan, but we must not legalize any misappropriation of the EI surplus, as employers, employees and the unemployed would never forgive us.

• (1535)

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I only want to make a comment and ask a question.

Could the member explain what happened during the election campaign when there were demonstrations in the Prime Minister's riding?

The Liberals had made some promises. One of the ministers, the public works minister, and another one whose name and title I cannot remember, promised people in Quebec that there were going to be further changes to employment insurance over and above what was in Bill C-44.

Could the member explain it to us in order to shed some light on the issue?

Mr. Paul Crête: Mr. Speaker, indeed, during the election campaign the Secretary of State for Amateur Sport and the Minister of Public Works promised a parliamentary committee to people, particularly union leaders, who came to meet with them, and told them "You are going to be able to propose your amendments".

There was some openness in this regard. It was said that they were open to changes. I hope this openness to changes did not mean that they would be able to put even more money in their pockets instead of handing it back to those who contributed to the plan.

In view of this position and the Prime Minister's statement, and I will end on this note, in the maritime provinces, acknowledging that there were several major flaws in the employment insurance reform, we are still waiting for this same Prime Minister to specifically acknowledge these flaws through amendments to Bill C-2, in order to bring about a true reform of the employment insurance plan instead of trying to hide the hijacking, by the Liberal government, of the surpluses in the EI fund.

[English]

Mr. Derek Lee (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

Mr. Greg Thompson: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The parliamentary secretary knows full well he is operating outside the rules of the House in wanting debate of this very important issue shut down. We are, as members have indicated, meeting at

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committee stage in the next few minutes. Let us continue the debate and air some of our grievances.

The Speaker: I have not heard anything that would indicate the motion to adjourn the debate is out of order. It is my duty to put the question to the House.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And more than five members having risen:

The Speaker: Call in the members.

• (1620)

[*Translation*]

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

(Division No. 11)

YEAS

Members

Adams
Allard
Assad
Bagnell
Belair
Bellemare
Bertrand
Binet
Bonin
Boudria
Bryden
Caccia
Cannis
Carignan
Catterall
Coderre
Comuzzi
Cotler
Cuzner
Dhaliwal
Drouin
Duplain
Eggleton
Farrah
Folco
Fry
Gray (Windsor West)
Guarnieri
Harvard
Hubbard
Jackson
Jordan
Knutson
Laliberté
Lee
Lincoln
MacAulay
Mahoney
Maloney
Marcil

Alcock
Anderson (Victoria)
Augustine
Baker
Bélanger
Bennett
Bevilacqua
Blondin-Andrew
Bonwick
Brown
Bulte
Calder
Caplan
Castonguay
Cauchon
Collenette
Copp
Cullen
DeVillers
Dion
Duhamel
Easter
Eyking
Finlay
Fontana
Godfrey
Grose
Harb
Harvey
Ianno
Jennings
Karetak-Lindell
Kraft Sloan
LeBlanc
Leung
Longfield
Macklin
Malhi
Manley
Marleau

Martin (LaSalle—Émard)
McCallum
McGuire
McLellan
Minna
Myers
O'Brien (London—Fanshawe)
Owen
Petry
Pettigrew
Pickard (Chatham—Kent Essex)
Price
Provenzano
Reed (Halton)
Richardson
Saada
Scherrer
Sgro
Speller
St-Jacques
Steckle
Szabo
Thibault (West Nova)
Tirabassi
Tonks
Valeri
Volpe
Whelan
Wood—137

Matthews
McCormick
McKay (Scarborough East)
McTeague
Mitchell
Neville
O'Reilly
Paradis
Peterson
Phinney
Pillitteri
Proulx
Redman
Regan
Robillard
Savoy
Scott
Shepherd
St. Denis
St-Julien
Stewart
Telegdi
Thibeault (Saint-Lambert)
Tobin
Torsney
Vanclief
Wappel
Wilfert

NAYS

Members

Abbott
Anders
Asselin
Bailey
Bergeron
Blaikie
Bourgeois
Brien
Burton
Cardin
Comartin
Dalphond-Guiral
Desrochers
Dubé
Elley
Fitzpatrick
Gagnon (Champlain)
Gallant
Godin
Grewal
Guay
Hanger
Herron
Hilstrom
Johnston
Laframboise
Lancôt
Lill
Lunn (Saanich—Gulf Islands)
MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough)
Marceau
McDonough
Ménard
Merrifield
Moore
Obhrai
Paquette
Perron
Proctor
Reynolds
Robinson
Roy
Schmidt
Solberg
Spencer
Stinson
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)

Ablonczy
Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands)
Bachand (Saint-Jean)
Bellehumeur
Bigras
Borotsik
Breitkreuz
Brisson
Cadman
Chatters
Crête
Day
Doyle
Duceppe
Épp
Forseth
Gagnon (Québec)
Girard-Bujold
Golding
Grey (Edmonton North)
Guimond
Hearn
Hill (Prince George—Peace River)
Jaffer
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Lalonde
Lebel
Loubier
Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni)
Manning
Mark
McNally
Meredith
Mills (Red Deer)
Nystrom
Pankiw
Penson
Plamondon
Rajotte
Ritz
Rocheleau
Sauvageau
Skelton
Sorenson
St-Hilaire
Strahl
Thompson (Wild Rose)

Toews
Wasylcia-Leis
Williams—99

Tremblay (Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay)
White (North Vancouver)

PAIRED MEMBERS

Barnes
Fournier
Rock

Carroll
Gauthier
Tremblay (Rimouski-Neigette-et-la Mitis)

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

* * *

[English]

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

Mr. Derek Lee (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all Notices of Motions for the Production of Papers be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

SPECIES AT RISK ACT

The House resumed from February 19 consideration of the motion that Bill C-5, an act respecting the protection of wildlife species at risk in Canada, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak once more about the species at risk bill. The last time I spoke on this, I had mentioned a number of aspects which satisfied us in principle.

• (1625)

I mentioned that inevitably a number of international agreements had been signed. However, the most important agreement, the one which requires species at risk laws, is the 1992 agreement called the Convention on Biodiversity, which clearly states that every country has to establish and apply legislation aimed at protecting

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species at risk. Canada is one of the signatories of this convention, and we are proud of this fact, because we must immediately pass laws aimed at protecting species at risk in Canada.

This explains why, as early as 1989, the government of Quebec and the national assembly passed a law for the protection of species at risk.

I have already spoken about the importance of Canada's international commitments. I have also dealt with the importance of and reasons for introducing such legislation. I am not necessarily referring to this specific bill.

Today, I will compare some aspects of this bill with the act passed by Quebec.

I said that it was somehow paradoxical for the federal government to introduce a bill because we, on this side of the House, believe that it would duplicate the efforts made by Quebec in the area of identification.

I will remind the House of the principles of the act introduced by Quebec in 1989. They are the identification of species at risk, the legal designation of those species and the protection of aquatic environment. All this is inevitably linked to recovery plans which must be implemented in collaboration with industry, landowners and non-profit organizations working on a daily basis to preserve the heritage of Quebec. So there are a certain number of elements and measures incorporated in this act.

For example, on the whole issue of identification of species, the bill will give legal status to the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada, or COSEWIC, which has so far identified more than 340 plant and animal species.

Do we have the same type of tool in Quebec? Was it necessary to create a committee on species at risk for the sake of having a double security net? The answer is no. If members look at Quebec's act, they will soon see that the province created, back in 1989, an advisory committee composed of scientists who are knowledgeable about species at risk in Quebec and who have identified more than 19 plant and animal species.

This advisory committee already exists. It is working in co-operation with the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada, or COSEWIC. However, we are disappointed by this government which has committed itself toward the government of Quebec and the provinces, through the harmonisation agreement on species at risk in Canada.

• (1630)

We must remember that the federal government promised the government of Quebec (The environment minister at the time was David Cliche) that it would co-operate with the provinces to ensure that it would not infringe upon provincial areas of jurisdiction nor duplicate provincial legislation.

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Obviously, the federal government did not keep its promise. We believe that habitat protection comes under provincial jurisdiction. We believe that the federal government should not interfere in this area. Under several of the clauses in the bill now before the House, the federal government would be able to get involved in wildlife habitat management in Quebec.

The government talks about protecting critical habitat, and if that is not a direct infringement upon one of Quebec's areas of jurisdiction, I do not know what it is. In clauses 37 through 73, that notion of critical habitat is directly applied. This is totally unacceptable.

It is unacceptable, because in Quebec we have species at risk legislation which sets out what we call recovery measures to protect the habitats.

Does the federal bill contain the same provisions? Again, the answer is yes. Why do we need federal legislation that sets out recovery plans when we already have some under Quebec legislation?

There is also the issue of compensation. The government is clearly improvising on the issue of compensation. During a briefing given by Environment Canada officials, we tried to ask them a few questions about the kind of compensation that would be provided to private landowners, but they were unable to give us a definite answer.

What we do know, in that regard, is that such compensation will be limited, because it says so in the bill. However, we would have liked to see a number of other provisions included in the bill. I am thinking, among other things, of the Pearse report, which said clearly that landowners who believed that they would suffer losses as a result of the application of the act would receive compensation equivalent to 50% of these losses.

If the bill before us today were clear on that, at least we would know what to expect. However, what we can expect from this government, and we see it very often in the bills introduced in the House, are provisions regarding regulations, which will be made at a later date and which we know nothing about.

As parliamentarians, we are asked to form an opinion and to take a stance on a bill when the regulations have not yet been tabled. This is totally unacceptable. If the government had wanted to be transparent, if it really had wanted people to know about the compensation process for landowners, then it would have tabled the regulations at the same time as the bill.

The enforcement issue is another aspect of this bill. I said a few moments ago that Quebec has had legislation on species at risk since 1989. I would add that not only does Quebec have legislation on species at risk, but it also has two other tools.

• (1635)

The first tool is the Quebec wildlife conservation act. In Quebec, we have species at risk legislation and perfectly adequate wildlife conservation legislation as well. We have fisheries regulations as well. These three enable us to protect our flora, our fauna and our aquatic environment.

Closer scrutiny of this bill, clauses 85 through 96 in particular, shows that the government plans to create a new authority. Its agents would intervene on both Quebec and Canadian territory.

How can we accept the creation of a new federal authority, when we in Quebec already have wildlife conservation officers? Those officers come under Quebec's wildlife conservation act. Why then create a new federal authority? How will it apply on our territory? That we do not know. We do not know what the protocols of intervention will be. We do not know what the authority's powers will be. This is totally unacceptable.

What is more, if this bill merely applied on crown lands, that is land under federal jurisdiction, we would not oppose it. If we were told "We are adopting a bill here in the House in order to protect endangered species in Canada's national parks" we would applaud that. We would applaud it because the protection of species is not restricted to a single territory, and we are fully aware of that.

What is more serious is that this legislation will not apply just to lands under federal jurisdiction. It is clearly indicated, and we must acknowledge that the minister has shown frankness, honesty and transparency by telling us so in this House, that the bill would also apply to Quebec lands.

The minister tells us that, to a certain extent, the bill would apply to lands belonging to the government of Quebec, including Quebec wildlife preserves. Imagine that, it would apply to lands managed by the government of Quebec. If the federal government deemed it necessary, agents of the federal authority could turn up on these Quebec owned and Quebec administered lands in order to enforce their law. If conflict is what it wants, I do not think the federal government could find a better way to stir it up.

Another aspect of this bill is the whole issue of offences, as if no offences are set out in the Quebec legislation. It is as if the Quebec law provides no offences for an individual who decides to stalk and kill an endangered species. The offences covered in the Quebec law are severe. Why have a federal law providing for offences as well?

• (1640)

The laws overlap. This is totally unacceptable, for two reasons. The first is because, and I have said this, there is blatant interference in areas under Quebec's jurisdiction. There is such blatant interference that the day the bill on endangered species was

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tabled, the minister acknowledged, to some extent, that the bill was open to legal challenge.

Have we the time for a legal challenge? If Quebec did not have a law, it would be a different matter. There is not only Quebec. It is as if the provinces were guilty of not protecting species. There are other provinces, including New Brunswick, that have a law as well. The expertise and the experience the Quebec government has acquired over 12 years of applying the law must be respected.

There is room for improvement, I agree. A law passed 12 years ago certainly needs updating, and I acknowledge this quite honestly. However, we must realize that the federal government is about to make a serious mistake by proposing this bill.

I think the only reason the government is considering tabling this bill is to be able to come meddling again in the name of environmental protection.

I understand the need for legislation on endangered species. Considering that there are over 70,000 wild species that exist and that have been identified in Canada during all these years, we can understand that. Far from me the idea of claiming that the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada, COSEWIC, did not do a good job, on the contrary.

Currently, under this harmonization agreement, the two governments are co-operating. COSEWIC, which identified 15 extinct species, 87 endangered species, 75 threatened species and 151 vulnerable species, shows that there is a real need for legislation. This is a bill that could have some teeth.

Today we are asking the government to act responsibly in its own jurisdictions. On this issue, as in all environmental issues, we are asking the government to take action in its own jurisdictions, instead of lecturing the Quebec government as it often does about specific issues. Let the federal government take action.

I would have liked the minister to be present in the House today. I would have asked him why the federal government took so long before introducing a bill to protect species at risk. The Quebec government passed such legislation in 1989, but the federal government still does not have an act to protect species on its lands and sites. Why did the federal government wait so long, more than nine years after signing the 1992 Convention on Biodiversity?

• (1645)

Throughout this mandate, we will remind the federal government that it must act in its jurisdictions, not only as regard threatened species, but also the contamination of its sites.

An hon. member: Which is its own business.

Mr. Bernard Bigras: Precisely, it is the federal government's own business. How can the government explain that some land and sites are currently contaminated? That contamination is getting into the water table. There is contamination of drinking water supplies in municipalities. My colleague from Sept-Îles, the hon. member for Manicouagan, strongly criticized the government for its inaction on the issue of the Sept-Îles airport.

Please explain why, in 2001, because of contaminated federal land, parents have to use bottled water to wash their kids. It is unacceptable.

Why do Shannon residents have to deal with contaminated water? How do you explain that the federal government has known since 1997 that the military base in Valcartier was contaminated and that it has always refused and is still refusing to co-operate with the government of Quebec?

I wrote to the minister at the beginning of the month and my letter remains unacknowledged, as if there was no emergency.

What we want is respect for our areas of jurisdiction. What we want is for the federal government to be proactive on environmental issues in its own areas of jurisdiction.

We will be examining this bill in detail. It seems that history is repeating itself once again. Need I remind the House that the government has introduced twice the bill now before the House? It was formerly known as Bill C-33. The provinces are not the only ones to oppose this bill, environmental groups do too, because it does not go far enough.

Once again, with this bill, the minister is alienating the provinces as well as the environmental groups. The minister should go back to the drawing board and introduce a bill that would protect endangered species in his own areas of jurisdiction and that would also respect our jurisdictions and avoid duplication with provincial legislation.

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): Before resuming debate, it is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the question to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment is as follows: the hon. member for Brandon—Souris, Agriculture.

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Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it is certainly my pleasure to speak to Bill C-5. I will give a bit of background before I actually get into analyzing the bill and what will be our party's position on it.

I thank those people in the constituency of Red Deer who gave me a 73% support margin, the 70% who turned out to vote. I thank the close to 40,000 people who put an *x* beside my name. I also thank my wife, my family, and all those campaign workers who did so much work to make that happen.

• (1650)

This is my first speech as the official opposition environment critic. I think it is fair to tell the House a bit of my background in environment. It is fitting as well that I live in probably the most beautiful riding in Canada. I know there will be some dispute in that regard, but I have parkland, lakes, foothills, the Rocky Mountains and part of Banff National Park in my riding. It certainly rivals most constituencies and is a good one for the environment representative to be from.

In high school I was very interested in biology and the environment. Most people in my constituency would probably consider me somewhat of an environmentalist. I was very active in the province of Saskatchewan in the Saskatchewan Natural History Society, the publishing of the *Blue Jay* magazine, Christmas bird counts and sharp-tailed grouse dancing grounds. All those were part of my high school days in Saskatoon.

In university I majored in biology. During the summers I worked for the Canadian Wildlife Service. I was involved in habitat protection projects, in sandhill crane projects at Big Grass Marsh in Manitoba. I spent a lot of summertime working on environmental issues with environmental groups.

Upon graduating from university I moved to Red Deer where I was a high school biology teacher for 14 years. During that time I became rather known in the community as part of the parks board and for habitat protection. Many people would remember me as a teacher who could get many teenage students up at 6.30 in the morning to go out on early morning birding trips and partake in nature. We did a lot of biological studies. We studied areas in Kananaskis on the east slopes, the Syncrude project and many other environmentally related subjects.

I was very involved with a committee that preserved the river valley. We are very proud of our 28 kilometres of trails and of our pristine river valley and creeks. We had to do a lot of environmental lobbying through the seventies to make that happen. It is something of which our city is very proud. The Gates Lakes Sanctuary, the Kerry Woods Nature Centre are all things that are the pride of our community.

I was involved in the provincial organization which was a co-operative one between industry and education called SEEDS, Society Environmental Education Development Society. That group was very active in much of the curriculum development within the province of Alberta.

I used to travel as well and shared the stage with people like David Suzuki, talking about the Conserver Society. My only comment there would be that in the seventies I was probably 20 years ahead of what today is common sense knowledge.

I will now refer to the bill itself and where it is at. All of us are interested in the environment, 100% of Canadians. We all want to preserve species at risk. I am surprised when the government did its poll that it found 92% of Canadians cared. I am really surprised it was not 100%. I cannot imagine people saying they are not interested in preserving an endangered species. We are on common ground there.

All of us also realize that there are tradeoffs in environmental issues. Some would have a pristine environment. Obviously those people would be prepared to live in a cave, not have roads, not have modern conveniences. Then we could have a pristine environment. On the other side there are industrialists who would probably pave the world. Of course that would be unsustainable, would not last and certainly would not be acceptable.

Somewhere there is middle ground on environmental issues. I believe all of us have to work very hard at achieving that. Extremes are not acceptable on either side. It is that middle ground we must work toward.

• (1655)

The Liberal record on the environment is not very good. Let me talk a bit about that and how it relates to the Endangered Species Act. In 1992 a protocol was signed saying that we would put legislation in place to protect endangered species. The 1993 red book talked about ensuring a clean healthy environment for Canadians and the preservation of natural species. The 1997 red book also said that. The 2000 red book did not say much about it.

What does the environment commissioner say about the government and what we have done environmentally? Let me quote a couple of statements that I think puts it in perspective: "In many areas the Liberal government's performance falls short of its stated objectives. This gap reflects the failure to translate policy directly into effective action".

The commissioner went on to say: "Although the federal government has repeatedly stated its commitment to sustainable development, striking a balance between economic, social and environmental goals now and for future generations, it continues to have difficulty turning the commitment into action".

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No one says it is easy to deal with environmental legislation. No government will have an easy time with it. However, 100% of Canadians would say that the government should deal with environmental issues, be it water or endangered species which Bill C-5 addresses.

There are many examples of where the government has failed to deal with the problems. Many of them have been identified. Just to name a few, if we started with toxic waste sites we would find that according to most groups there are some 10,000 toxic waste sites across the country.

The most notable one is the Sydney tar ponds that have been talked about for 100 years. Legislation has been proposed. Solutions have been proposed. A committee is in operation but it has no timelines. It does not know where it is going. Basically no one is happy. Industry is not happy. People are not happy. Politicians are not happy. The provinces are not happy. Everyone recognizes the problem. Government and all of us in all parties need to work on that. We cannot say we will fix it and then not do it.

Kyoto is another example. I was not the environment critic then; I was in foreign affairs. I know how Kyoto was dealt with in the House. When the minister said he was going to Kyoto questions were asked as to the cost involved if he signed the agreement, what would happen, what would be the socioeconomic implications of signing the agreement, how he would deliver on that signature if he were to sign it.

The Americans were very clear. They could not sign it because they had not done enough homework. The Australians came with a lot of homework done and even they had trouble. We went ahead and signed it. Now we are finding that our emissions are 11% higher. We have guaranteed to lower them 6% below 1990 levels. When we do not deliver on our promises, people stop trusting us.

Bill C-5 is just that kind of legislation. We can introduce it and put all the words in place, but if we have no intention of delivering we have some serious problems.

Let me make it extremely clear, because I do not want a headline saying that the Alliance opposes endangered species legislation, that the Alliance Party supports endangered species legislation. We want it and we encourage the government. It should have come sooner. We want endangered species legislation. It is a good idea. It is supported by farmers, ranchers, industry, individuals, scientists and environmentalists. We want it but we want the right legislation. We want legislation that will work.

• (1700)

Through our committee I hope we will be able to put together legislation that will work to preserve and protect endangered

species. The worst thing we could do is to put forward another bill that will not work and that no one has thought through.

I will speak to the history behind the legislation and why we are doing it. I mentioned that the convention on biological diversity was signed in 1992. At that point we said that Canada would go along with many countries in terms of this kind of legislation. Was it a popular move? Yes, it was right on. It should have been done and we should be doing it.

We did not implement anything for eight years. It is not totally the government's fault because there were all kinds of problems with Bill C-65. Most people were happy that it died when the election was called in 1997. Bill C-33 was an improvement. A lot of people would say that, but it died with the call of the election in 2000.

Red book three did not mention any legislation on species at risk. I assume that was a typographical problem, that the publisher forgot to put it in, and that the page designated to species at risk was left out. I assume the payment to the printer was reduced because he did such a bad job of printing red book three.

Let us talk about the international scene. As many members know, I am very interested in international events. I am really concerned that in productivity Canada has dropped from third to 13th. In many areas of health care we are 23rd out of 29 OECD countries. Environmentally we have dropped from fifth to seventh in terms of world ratings. That really concerns me.

When I travel I ask people what they think of Canada. They usually say positive things and I say positive things about my country. I love Canada. I would not be here if I did not. They tell me the Canada they think of is one with pristine lakes, limitless forests, wolves and bears literally on most corners, mighty rivers teeming with salmon, and the land filled with bounty; the most beautiful place in the world.

My riding is pretty beautiful but it has environmental problems. I do not know of many places in Canada that do not have some environmental problems. We love to have international people think of those wonders. Obviously tourism is very important. I used to be part of that industry. Certainly it was great to welcome foreigners to our country and it still is. However we must shape up in terms of protecting our environment. We must start doing things that show leadership in protecting the environment. That is partly what Bill C-5 is all about.

What kind of legislation do we want? We could follow the examples we find in the U.S. We could follow examples from some other parts of the world, but we could also learn from the mistakes they have made.

Why should we introduce 1970 California legislation when it did not work? Why should we go through the pains of Oregon,

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Montana and Colorado when there were problems there? Let us fix what they did wrong and learn from that. Let us do what they have done in Britain and Tanzania.

On first analysis we see Bill C-5 as being weak and ineffective. It has not listened to the provinces, industry, environmental groups and landowners to deliver legislation that will work. What is our job? It is to try to fix it. As the opposition we will commit to working with the government to bring forward amendments and to try to make it work.

• (1705)

The minister said that he was very favourably disposed to amendments. I hope he means that. If he does, we will work with him because the legislation is good and popular for everyone. However, it has to be legislation that will work. The government cannot say that it knows best and that we should have trust. It cannot be that kind of legislation because a lot of people out there do not totally trust government to deliver what is good for them.

We need to be sure that we consult, listen to and implement what the people are telling us. That becomes very important in the bill.

We must also remember that there is a great deal of distrust. Some people feel, maybe wrongly, that they will lose their business, be it a farm, an industry or a job in a mine, because of legislation like this.

We need to sit down with people and show them how legislation in other parts of the world has been designed so that it will work. It cannot be rammed through with closure. It cannot be top down and heavy on penalties, threats and attacks because that will never work. That has been tried and it did not work. It meant that endangered species became extinct because of the type of legislation that was there.

Let us learn from that and not waste money, RCMP time and conservation officers' time trying to enforce a bill that has not been well thought out and designed in this place.

Let us not talk about the heavy penalties, the non-compliance, the RCMP and the heavy hand of government. Let us talk about what kind of legislation will work to save endangered species.

Canadians are in favour of preserving endangered species. We are in favour of preserving endangered species. Farmers, ranchers, industrialists and environmentalists are in favour. Therefore all members of the House should be on the winning side.

How would we as the opposition improve the legislation? What should we do? What must we look at? I will spend the rest of my time speaking about how we can develop better legislation. I will put forward a few suggestions. Obviously I will miss some. Obviously some will come out from people we call as witnesses at committee. They will have all kinds of suggestions. I have a long

list of people who want to come and make sure parliament hears their voice. We had better be here to listen.

What do we need to do? First, we need to co-operate. The word co-operation has to be critical in the legislation. Let us start with the provinces. We must not threaten provinces. We must listen to the member who spoke before me who said that Quebecers feel threatened by the legislation. That cannot be. It will not work in Quebec if they feel threatened by the legislation.

We cannot use court challenges. We cannot simply do driveby smears. We cannot have ministers using innuendo on one province over another. All provinces must be treated equally. We must remember that all the provinces have signed an agreement stating that they will implement and support endangered species legislation. That must tell us how important this is if all the provinces have agreed already.

We already have taken a step in co-operation. Now we must build on it. Having the provinces on side is critical. This cannot work if they do not work with us. I think all members would agree with that.

Second, we have to have the landowners on side. We cannot expect landowners to absorb all of the cost of protecting something that 100% of us want to protect. If all of us want to protect an endangered species, all of us must absorb the cost of doing it. We must have input into it and feel part of it. That would be very positive.

• (1710)

What kinds of things can we do? Habitat preservation is really interesting. I was involved in such a project. I mentioned that I worked for Canadian Wildlife Service as a biologist. In one of my jobs I spent the whole winter identifying habitat for migrating waterfowl. We used aerial photographs to identify the stopping places and breeding places of waterfowl across western Canada. I forget how many millions of dollars we had, but we had a bankroll and we signed agreements with farmers to protect that habitat for 25 years.

I was in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. I went to a place called Derwent, Alberta. I was driving a government vehicle when I showed up in town. I went to the restaurant for a cup of coffee and breakfast, and they would not serve me. I then went to a gas station to fill up the tank, and they would not serve me. I then went to the RCMP and an officer said he wished I had not come to the station because people would see me there. I asked him what was wrong with me. What was wrong was that I was driving a government vehicle and people thought I was a tax collector or something. They did not know what I was doing, so they sent me out of town.

I went to Edmonton and met with a lawyer whose name I got from the RCMP. I explained to him what I was doing. When I went

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back to that community I got a free breakfast. Everybody said hi and knew my name.

I had x number of dollars. I phoned Canadian Wildlife Service in Saskatoon about two or three weeks later and said I was out of money, that all the agreements I had worked on during the winter were signed. My boss said they could not be because it was a whole summer's work. When I said that they were, he told me to make friends for wildlife in that part of Alberta, which I did.

I went to Ukrainian weddings, which often lasted a week, for an entire summer. That was co-operation. People there were happy to be involved in preserving wildlife. They did not have any problem with that at all. They were happy not to drain or burn and to provide nesting sites for migrating waterfowl. They were compensated and we co-operated with them. That is how we must approach this subject.

Had the heavy hand of government come down on those people telling them that they must preserve the area or they would be fined \$50,000, their land would be seized or whatever, there would not have been many nesting waterfowl in the area. The government would have been treated like I was when I first drove down Main Street. It would not have been welcome.

I could use other examples. Ducks Unlimited is an interesting example. It often encourages people with incentives to protect water and wetlands areas, and it works great. It works right across the country. It has been in business a long time working with people.

I cannot help but tell the story of the gorillas in Rwanda. My wife and I spent a month in Rwanda in 1985. We trekked after the mountain gorillas. We followed them and we lived with them literally for a couple of days. There are fewer than 500 of them left. Fortunately, however, even with the wars they have not been decimated. The reason for that is farmers in the area who were encroaching on their habitat were told that tourists like to come and see the mountain gorillas. They were told that some of the profit from tourism in the area would be shared with them and that they would be paid not to knock down the bamboo the mountain gorillas eat.

In countries like Rwanda, Tanzania and South Africa there are many examples of co-operation in the protection of endangered species. They are doing a heck of a job. It does not cost a lot and it is working. We have to look at all of those examples and I hope we will be able to do that in committee.

• (1715)

The best conservationists I know are farmers and ranchers. I had a fellow from my riding phone me recently. He has owned his land for 100 years. For 40 years he set aside 180 acres for wildlife. He asked me if he should plough it this spring because he has an

endangered species on the land. He said he wanted them there so his grandchildren to see them, but the government might seize the land. That is what these people are thinking. I know the legislation does not say that but the people do not know that. That is why we need the time to communicate with those Canadians who are affected by this.

We should not simply brush off the farmers and ranchers as a bunch of selfish guys who want money. That is not true at all. They want to save endangered species but they want a co-operative way of doing it. Let us make sure the legislation does that.

A difficult area to talk about is our aboriginal communities. It is very important that all Canadians be treated equally in preserving endangered species. It is very important that our native leaders, as well as the grassroots natives, be onside with any endangered species legislation or it will not work. It creates jealousy and conflict in the neighbourhoods and it puts the species at risk. Whether we are talking about grizzly bears, or salmon or whatever, all Canadians need to be treated equally in this legislation. I cannot emphasize the importance of that.

We need to recognize that many aboriginal people are very concerned about the natural world. We need to recognize that it is part of their religious ceremonies in many respects. We also recognize that if we just talk to the chiefs and not the grassroots who are living in substandard conditions, without sewer and water facilities, and living in impoverished situations, this legislation will not work.

I was troubled when I read the part of the legislation where it said the government would enforce the legislation for Canadians and that it would consult the aboriginal communities. We cannot just consult. They need to feel that they are part of this. The need to be brought into the consultations. We cannot leave them out. They have to buy into this. They have to be a part of the groups who make the decisions. They have to be included in the round tables. They have to be part of everything. If they are not, this will not work.

It is difficult to include that because some would say that I was picking on them. I am not. I am saying that we treat all Canadians equally. For me, that bill does not make that clear. Let us make it clear. Let us bring them to our committees. If we do that, we will be successful.

It is important that we include industry in this list. It is good business for industry to be interested in endangered species. That is just smart. The member for Wetaskiwin would like this example. When Union Carbide decided to build a petrochemical plant in his riding, one of the first things it did was get together with a group and purchase a farm. It is called the Ellis Bird Farm which raises bluebirds. The mountain bluebirds have thrived because of what Union Carbide did. Community groups are working with it to work on this kind of enhancement of a species.

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• (1720)

As well, when we talk about industry, we must do a socio-economic study. We must include the socio-economic impact as part of any endangered species list.

It is not just a simple matter of saying we are going to protect all endangered species. While it is easy to say we all agree with that, we must look at all of the implications, be it the aboriginal communities, industry, farmers, ranchers or compensation. All of these issues must be part of the bill. To make this bill too simple will not work. It will not save any species. That is a major concern.

Before I leave the Ellis Bird Farm, there are so many committed people across Canada. Myrna Pearman is a person who should be recognized. She is the director, although I am not sure of her exact title, of the Ellis Bird Farm. She makes it click. She makes the community feel part of it. She makes Union Carbide a welcome industry in that community.

I know there are hundreds of examples. I know there are lots of examples in Ontario and in Atlantic Canada of the same sort of individuals and same sort of projects with industry. They must be consulted. If they are not consulted, they will not be players and they will not participate. That will endanger the endangered species.

When I talk about what is important and what would we do, co-operation has to be a word we focus on.

Let me just zero in on a few other areas we want to talk about with some specifics. I am going to list these quickly and obviously we will have a chance to elaborate more on them later.

We must take time to consult. We cannot have closure. We cannot have the minister saying it has to get through by June. I do not know why we waited eight years. If it takes longer than June, than let it. However, let us do the consultation that is necessary. Let us do it right, if we are going to do it at all.

First, we need the full committee review. I have now talked to 12 environmental groups, a whole bunch of industrialists and I will be talking to a lot more farmers and ranchers. They want to be heard. It is the duty of the House to listen to them. We need to listen to the provinces and talk to each one of them. We cannot use closure or ram this down our throats to get it through and be done with it. It is too important for that in my opinion.

Second is the species at risk list. Let COSEWIC, the scientists, determine the list. I found it troubling, and maybe I did not understand something, that cabinet would decide on the list. I do not want the cabinet deciding on that. I want scientists making that decision. I want socio-economic impact studies and I want to hear

from scientists. I trust them a lot more. I want the broad range of scientists, not just the small range.

Just to make sure we get it clear, many groups have spoken on endangered species. There are many people out there who should be listened to. It is important that COSEWIC base everything it does on science, not on politics. It should be the scientists who make the legal list in consultation with all of the people I mentioned. It should not be left to political lobbying, to political favouritism or to that sort of thing. It is too important an issue to Canadians to be left only in the realm of politicians.

Third is communication and co-operation. The only way this will be successful is if we put emphasis on the voluntary and on communication. The bill says we would have round tables. I have sat at round tables of foreign affairs. At one there were four defeated Liberal candidates and three fundraisers who were there for a weekend with their wives and good meals. They could not have given a damn about the issue we were talking about. I want those round tables to be real round tables. They are a good idea but let us make them for all groups. Let us listen to the extremes, the middle and then come to our conclusions. They are a good idea but let us communicate properly and let us get the feeling of the whole country.

• (1725)

Right now the country is suspicious about what we are doing. Compensation is a major issue and the minister said this in his speech. We must deal with it and it must be in the bill. It is not good enough to say it will be in the regulations and trust us. It is not in the bill now. The only thing that is acceptable is to have that in the bill.

We have serious problems with the Pearse report. I feel it is a formula for disaster. It will make the endangered species act not work. We need to have compensation in the bill. We need to spell it out and make it clear. If we do we will please an awful lot of people and go a long way in getting the bill through.

Provincial-federal co-operation is vital. We need to see the mechanism on how that is going to work and make sure it works.

With the issue of enforcement, we cannot have willy-nilly "we'll enforce it" because Environment Canada does not have the ability to enforce it. It says the RCMP will not be involved, so who is going to enforce this? How can we have a bill that has no enforcement? Is there going to be something? Again, we are told that it would be in the regulations. That is not good enough. We have to see it. We have to know what that means before it can be accepted.

In conclusion, the official opposition believes in an effective endangered species legislation. We support it. We want to make it work. We want to make it better. We believe that we can get effective endangered species legislation and that we can be world

leaders. We have to have a full hearing in committee and clearly communicate and talk to Canadians. We need scientists, not politicians listing the endangered species. We need innovative approaches. We need to learn from what others have done. We need compensation as part of the bill. It must be there.

We need to talk about recovery and habitat protection, not just species. We cannot just really protect a species, we have to protect its habitat. How do we do that? Of course compensation comes into that. Get the politicians out of it. The round tables have to include all Canadians.

Above all, I came to parliament because I wanted to make a better Canada for my children and my grandchildren. I want them to be able to see grizzly bears catching salmon in B.C. I want them to be able to see dancing prairie chickens. I want them to see sandhill cranes and whooping cranes. I want them to hear the loon on lakes in Ontario. I want them to be able to see the beluga whales at the mouth of the St. Lawrence. I want them to be able to see teeming stocks of cod and other sea life in Atlantic Canada.

We can make this happen. We can make this country what so many international people think of it. However, we are going to have to work at it. We are going to have to work co-operatively at it. That is what we will be working toward in working with the government, hopefully, on Bill C-5.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): If there is agreement with the House, I would like to call it 5.30 p.m. and go into private members' hour. Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): It being 5.30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1730)

[Translation]

FUEL PRICE POSTING ACT

Mr. Guy St-Julien (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik, Lib.) moved that Bill C-220, an act respecting the posting of fuel prices by retailers, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

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He said: Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to demand on behalf of consumers that the pre-tax price of a litre of gas be posted. As I said when I introduced this bill, when a fuel retailer causes a poster, label or sign to be posted indicating the selling price for a fuel, the price must be indicated without any taxes imposed on the consumer under federal or provincial legislation.

When we introduce a bill in the House, it is placed on the notice paper and then we have to wait for the draw. Sometimes one has to wait one, two or three years before one's bill comes up in the draw. If one is lucky, one's bill might be one of the first ones to be drawn. I was lucky, which is fortunate for consumers.

Then the bill is reviewed by a committee, and one has to explain why it should be made a votable item or not. One goes before the committee members, as I did last week. Members listen to find out what the bill is all about. I explained all that to the committee.

Then the committee meets a second time to determine whether the bill should be made a votable item. And this is when the problem starts. Once at this stage, and even earlier in the process, there should be a draw to decide which bills are votable and which ones are not. This is the problem we have in the House.

At the second meeting, last Friday, when opposition members saw that I was introducing this bill, Bloc members and Alliance members alike said "This is a provincial matter. This is a matter for provincial governments. You have no business introducing such a bill". Therefore I did not win; it was decided my bill was not votable. But it does not matter, because in the House the main thing is to speak on behalf of consumers.

I am going to tell the House what the price of a litre of gas is: today in Val d'Or, in Abitibi, it is 77.9 cents. Very few people know what the price of a litre of gasoline is before taxes. However if people call the Régie de l'énergie in Quebec, the experts will explain what it is.

The price we see announced is 77.9 cents per litre, but when we go in to pay the bill after filling up the tank, we see a total of \$40, for example, but we do not see the 10 cent excise tax or the 10.55 cent Quebec road tax on the invoice. In our region we do not have a 1.5 cent special tax, as they do in Montreal. However, in Montreal motorists pay 15.55 cents, whereas in Abitibi, thanks to the government in office, we pay 10.55 cents because we live in a remote area. Then there is the GST and the QST.

Consumers only see two taxes; they do not see the other taxes. In the meantime, oil companies, such as Petro-Canada, put a sticker on the pumps that says that taxes are included in the price. That sticker has been there for months. It is still there. The funny thing is that once they stick it there, they forget to remove it.

Today, the price of gas in Abitibi is 77.9 cents. Petro-Canada has a sticker on the pump saying that taxes are 51%. Let us take this

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price of 77.9 cents and add a few figures. The minimum price, according to the Régie de l'énergie, is 35.8 cents. The cost of transporting gas to Val d'Or is about 2.4 cents per litre. The cost of transporting it to Quebec City or to Montreal is about 0.3 cents per litre. If we add it up, 35.8 cents plus 2.4 cents, we get a total of 44.4 cents, which means that taxes would be 33.5 cents.

Now we get to the sticker. I am targeting Petro-Canada in particular because the Government of Canada owns 18% of that company. The consumer does not know what the exact price of a litre of gas is without taxes because it is not posted.

● (1735)

Throughout the year consumers are aware of the multiple billion dollar profits Canada's oil companies are making. They know how much the bosses and their friends are collecting in dividends, yet the companies are unable to tell us how much a litre of gas costs at the pumps. They do not want to tell the consumers this.

Yesterday morning, at 6.35, I went to a gas station and asked for a litre of gas just for the fun of it. How much would it cost? On Chemin de la Montagne in Hull, the posted price was 70.9 cents a litre. I tried to get a litre but did not manage to get exactly that. I went inside and paid my 70 cents, then went back out and tried to pump a litre. I ended up with 1.03 litres for 71 cents, yet the posted price was 70.9 cents.

Let hon. members try to do the calculation of what the price of a litre of gas is without the taxes. No matter what means we use, this is impossible. The oil companies are billionaires many times over, but they cannot tell the consumer how much a litre of gas costs.

We know that a litre of gas costs 35.8 cents anywhere in Quebec. The price added on top of that is for shipping it to the regions. In Nunavik people do not know the price of a litre of gas. We know, however, that 4 cents a litre is for getting it to the Chapais, Chibougamau, Matagami and James Bay regions.

We know that the profit margin is included in the price per litre at the pump. That is what I want to say to the government, and I tried to have a motion passed making the bill votable.

We know that the government of Quebec is doing a very good job, because it allows reductions on the transportation tax or the special tax in the outlying regions.

What is happening right now? Father Charles-Aimé Ancil, Val-d'Or's parish priest, wrote me the following one day: "What a surprise not to hear politicians up in arms about the hike in gas prices. Don't tell me that you can't do anything: you are the ones with the power".

We are doing everything we can to get the oil companies to post the gross price of a litre of gasoline, minus the taxes. They are not interested. When we ask them why, we are told that it is the governments that are opposed. I put the question to the government

of Quebec and to the Government of Canada and I was told that the problem was not them but the oil companies.

The biggest laugh of all is that there is nothing preventing the oil companies from posting the gross price of a litre of gas in Canada.

As of today, the price of a litre of gas in Quebec is 35.8 cents. It should be possible to find out the gross price of a litre of gas, minus the taxes, in Ontario, Manitoba or Vancouver, but it is not, because Petro-Canada's pumps break the price down into benefits: 1%, price of crude oil, 30%, refinery costs, 18% and taxes 51%. That is what is posted today.

However a look below, at the little bottom line reveals the words "average prices at the pump in 1999". We are being had by Petro-Canada, by misinformation. At the moment, the oil companies are worth billions and cannot even manage to change the labels.

It is disgusting that a company belonging to the Government of Canada is incapable of being in consumer mode and revealing the cost of gasoline without taxes.

The aim of the bill is to find ways to enable the consumer to discover the real price of gasoline. A consumer buying a litre of gasoline in Abitibi, Senneterre or anywhere in Quebec knows he pays the QST and the GST. He knows he has to pay the excise tax. He also knows there is a provincial tax. He knows there are taxes for Tom, Dick and Harry, but he cannot know the gross price of a litre of gasoline.

In some provinces, there is no provincial tax. All the better for consumers. One day, with luck, we may not have to pay the provincial tax on a litre of gasoline in Quebec.

● (1740)

What counts most is reporting to consumers, telling them "Here is your product and the cost of it". A litre of gasoline in Quebec is currently 35.8 cents, plus transport, which in Abitibi, and I am still talking about my region, is 2.4 cents and the service station profit may be 3 or 4 cents, but we can live with that.

We can live with the taxes. In any case, we will always have to pay them somewhere. We will take it in our righthand or lefthand pocket. We are always going to get hit. Be it under the government of Quebec or the Government of Canada, we will always be paying taxes somewhere.

What matters to me is knowing the gross price charged by an oil company for a litre of gas. Not many people have this information. We have specialists. Perhaps we will know more tomorrow because the report on competition, or the study that was done, is supposed to be tabled tomorrow.

Here is what the study said:

That the oil industry should bear in mind the public's level of frustration and adopt more transparent pricing practices, including showing the gross price and giving the breakdown for refinery, processing, whole sale and retail prices, and taxes.

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I think that everyone's interests would be better served if the industry made a greater effort to explain how prices are set and made this information available to consumers.

This quote is from a letter sent me by the minister on June 5, 2000. I have nothing prepared, I am speaking off the cuff. The federal Minister of Natural Resources wrote me and recommended precisely what I have just said: "that the consumer should be better informed". That is what is important.

It matters little which governments are in power in Canada. What matters is the consumer. When we go into a corner store, we know that a case of beer costs \$22 plus taxes. On the reserve, it costs \$22 without taxes. That is another story. Whenever one goes to buy something, one knows the price. Here in Ottawa, we know that the lunch special costs \$8.95, plus taxes.

Try that with a litre of gas. Everybody is upset at the Government of Canada regarding the price of gas in my region and elsewhere. I tell parliamentarians that there is no act preventing oil companies from doing that. There is no legislation preventing oil companies from indicating the gross price before taxes. There is no act preventing them from doing that. They do not want to do that, they are hiding things.

We should know tomorrow, because we just got a memo saying that Industry Canada will table its report on the oil industry tomorrow.

It is always the same thing with this issue. The government is the one being blamed. Sometimes this may be a good thing, but the government of Quebec is also blamed as well as all the provinces.

However, it is wrong to say that all the provinces regulate gas prices in Canada. Unless I am mistaken, there may be two provinces that have an energy board: Prince Edward Island and Quebec. These two provinces set a floor price. They can try to do so. Today in Quebec that floor price is 67.6 cents, depending on the regions. In Abitibi the floor price of a litre of gas is currently 67.6 cents. It is less than in Montreal, because in Montreal they also have taxes. These are special taxes for the metro, 1.55 cents, and others at 1.5 cents, 0.10 cents, 15.55 cents.

The important thing for Canadian consumers is to know what kind of products they are paying for. What is the capital? What the gross price before taxes? We do not know. This is what I am asking from oil companies. If it does not work here in Ottawa, I am asking oil companies to stand up and to show the real price of a litre of gas before taxes.

[*English*]

Mr. John Cannis: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. When the debate started I heard my name used as seconder. I would like it noted that such is not the case. Perhaps that could be addressed on the books and the hon. member could find somebody else to sponsor the bill.

• (1745)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): Is there unanimous consent for the member for Scarborough Centre not to be the seconder?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy St-Julien: Mr. Speaker, I believe there is an error. I mentioned to the pages at the beginning that the seconder of the motion was the hon. member for Fredericton. I would ask you to put the question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): I will not go through the pages. I will ask the hon. member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik, if the hon. member for Scarborough Centre does not want to be the seconder, would another hon. member want to replace him?

Mr. Guy St-Julien: Mr. Speaker, I said at the beginning that the seconder of my motion was the hon. member for Fredericton, and he was sitting beside me. If there is an error, this is not my problem. I was asked about this earlier.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): I must inform the hon. member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik that, when the motion was read, the hon. member for Fredericton was not sitting beside him. So I asked earlier if there was unanimous consent for the hon. member for Scarborough Centre not to be the seconder any more. There was no unanimous consent. So I think the problem is solved. The hon. member's colleague is still the seconder of the motion.

[*English*]

Mr. Gurmant Grewal (Surrey Central, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to participate in the debate on Bill C-220.

The bill would require fuel or gasoline retailers to indicate the selling price of fuel without including the price of the taxes that would be applied. I commend the hon. member for Abitibi—Baie James—Nunavik for his efforts in this regard.

It is no wonder that no one on the Liberal side is even standing to second the bill of their own party member. That is how they encourage private members' business. We of course want all private members' bills to be votable, but there is no one to even second this one.

The member's efforts would inform Canadians about the true price of fuel as opposed to the price we are paying, which includes taxes. The bill defines fuel as gasoline types of fuels used by internal combustion engines and diesel fuel and propane gas. The bill makes it clear that we are not talking about home heating oil or

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aircraft fuel. We are talking about the fuel we use in our automobiles.

I do not have too many problems with the bill. The bill is of course limited in scope, as well as limited in seconders, because it applies only to consumers buying gas for their cars. It seems to me that with the sharp spike in the price of home heating oil and gas, which has hit us so hard and is not included in the bill, the House should be consumed with that issue and that issue alone.

Canadians are suffering this winter in our cold climate. It is a particularly cold winter this year. There has been a 70% hike in natural gas prices which the Liberals did not foresee and did not prevent. They did nothing about it except to send out cheques of a couple of hundred dollars, and then too, to people who probably do not pay the heating bills, for example, students, prisoners or even deceased Canadians.

We know that Canadians are paying over a couple of thousand dollars compared to the couple of hundred dollars that the cheques are for. The government completely missed the target of sending the cheques to those most in need of assistance with their heating bills this winter.

The Liberal finance minister has no sympathy for Canadian seniors or persons on fixed incomes who have so little money that they are choosing among getting their prescriptions filled, what they can afford to buy to eat, or heat.

• (1750)

I might add that it is also the Liberal government's fault that our heating fuel costs are higher than those in the U.S.A. This government keeps our taxes high and our dollar weak. We are being hurt twice. It is a double whammy.

Let us talk about gas prices, which is what the bill talks about. We started to see the price hikes about a year ago. It is the amount of tax placed on gas that has driven the price upward. We get really upset when gasoline prices jump by 10 cents or 20 cents per litre and we hate it when it happens overnight. We hate it most when it happens on a Friday just before a long weekend. We all feel that we are hostages to gasoline prices while we also rely heavily on our automobiles for all kinds of work.

The Canadian Alliance's chief natural resources critic, the hon. member for Athabasca, in Alberta, is of course very knowledgeable on the subject of gasoline prices. He has been working in this area for a long time. My colleagues and I have great respect for his understanding of this field in particular. He has been recommending transparency in the price of gasoline and has been advocating this on behalf of consumers. He explains that the price we pay at the gas pumps includes a tremendous amount of tax. That is why, when the price of gas or oil on the world market is hiked, we feel it,

because not only is the price of the gas hiked but the taxes also get higher with respect to that increase.

This exacerbates the increase in the wholesale price. If it were not for the taxes piled on top of the price of the gas, Canadians would not be so radically affected by the price hikes in the world price of oil.

Canadians want to be able to clearly see the gouge made in their pocketbooks by taxes on gas. It is not the oil companies that are the villains here. It is the taxes. If Canadians could see the large amount of taxes applied to the price of gas it would heighten awareness in Canada of the importance of tax cuts. Taxpayers could properly direct their frustration and anger at the governments applying these taxes, particularly the federal government.

Everyone knows that the Canadian Alliance stands for tax cuts. About 9 cents per litre of gas is federal tax. On top of that we have a provincial excise tax. On top of that we have a provincial sales tax. On top of that we have the GST. We have a tax on a tax on a tax and on a tax. This is very unfair.

I have some facts and figures from the B.C. edition of *FuelFacts* for February 13, 2001, which is the latest edition. *FuelFacts* monitors the price of gas. Clearly we can see from the chart that gas is 29.5 cents per litre. When all the taxes are piled on top of that 29.5 cents, the price of the same gas is 74 cents per litre. That is a shame. Only 16 cents of this 74 cent per litre price goes to the refiner and the marketer of the gasoline.

Some people might say that is how the government raises revenue to pay for the things we need such as health care, highways, schools, prisons, free flags, golf courses, hotels for the Prime Minister's riding and so on. However, my province of British Columbia gets only 5% of the amount of federal taxes we pay on gas. This amount is returned to us to pay for transportation infrastructure.

In 1997 the federal Liberals raked in about \$360 million in fuel taxes from British Columbia. This figure has risen. It is now about \$700 million a year. The federal government returns only 5% to British Columbia and B.C. is the only province in the whole country that does not have any four lane highways. We cannot even buy enough street lamps with the 5% that the Liberals return to us for transportation and infrastructure development.

• (1755)

Where do all of our tax dollars and tax revenues raised by gasoline taxes go? They are not helping us in B.C. to pay for our highways, our airports, the RCMP, border protection, the coast guard or emergency preparedness, et cetera. Our money is being kept in Ottawa or is being spent by Ottawa. Maybe it is being spent on some of the boondoggles or maybe in the Prime Minister's riding for fountains. Who knows where the money goes? There are

many factors in this other than high taxes. Sometimes it is surprising to see how the geography works.

Prices are affected exponentially with the increase in the price at the original level. Sometimes a 5 cent increase becomes a 10 cent or 15 cent increase at the consumer level because of the taxes.

In regard to gas stations, I want to mention that the government should be investigating how, on any morning, afternoon or evening, gasoline prices can suddenly increase, sometimes within seconds or minutes. However, when the price of fuel goes down, it takes two or three days for the gas station prices to go down. What are we supposed to conclude when that happens? Is it collusion, price fixing or an oligopoly? What happens to the stock or inventory of the retailers?

We do not want to interfere with their private businesses. We want supply and demand, or competition, to control the market, but at the same time we need to balance that with the public interest. We do not want the public to be victimized or exploited by the federal government's taxes and then by businesses and so on.

In conclusion, the bill would make it clear exactly how much money per litre of gas is being taken by the government out of the pockets of Canadians. However, isolating the amount of taxes from the actual cost may not be the real solution for giving any tax relief to Canadians.

In the end, maybe we do not need to legislate. Maybe the retailers would volunteer.

However, the hon. member's bill is a very thoughtful idea and I tend to support it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy St-Julien: Mr. Speaker, to follow the rules of the House of Commons, I would like to change the name of the seconder of my bill. I seek the unanimous consent of the House to have the name of the hon. member for Scarborough Centre replaced by the name of the hon. member for York West, who is here.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): Is there unanimous consent to proceed in such a fashion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Pierre Brien (Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to hear that the member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik has finally found somebody to second his bill. It took a while.

In the same vein, and before getting to the substance of the issue, at the beginning of his speech, the member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik accused the opposition parties of not agreeing, at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, to make his bill a votable item.

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For the sake of transparency, I request unanimous consent, and offer our total co-operation, to make this bill a votable item. Therefore, before getting to my speech, I would ask for the unanimous consent of the House to make this bill a votable item.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): Is there unanimous consent to make this bill a votable item?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Pierre Brien: Mr. Speaker, things are crystal clear. Members on the government side refused to make this bill a votable item. So now everybody knows who wants to make it votable and who does not.

Let us put this debate into perspective. What is the situation on the fuel market? Over the last year or year and a half, there has been an exceptional increase of prices causing hardship to consumers. It creates inflation. Truck drivers, farmers, consumers and people using heating oil are affected. This crisis is ongoing and is costly for consumers.

At the same time, we have an industry making record profits and governments raking in huge amounts of taxes, especially the federal government, which collects taxes not only on fuel but also on oil companies' profits.

• (1800)

Let me add that the federal government will collect more than \$5 billion thanks to the excise tax and will only reinvest 6% in the highway system. This is an incredible cash cow for the government; the high prices of gasoline, petroleum products and petroleum-based products is not a problem for the government since they generate additional revenues. However, for consumers, they represent a real loss of their purchasing power, and consumers are really feeling it.

Therefore, the issue is an important one. How did the government address the problem? It did two things. First, last spring it asked the Conference Board to review the situation. We have not yet seen the study; we will have it tomorrow.

I am announcing, and it is a scoop, that members will learn that, according to the conference board, the oil industry is doing fine. According to the versions of the report that are in circulation at this time, and of which we have a copy, we can see that it contains no criticism of the oil industry. Members should not expect great miracles tomorrow or they will be disappointed. In fact, this is not surprising since oil companies happen to be members of the conference board.

The second thing the government did was just before the election. What did it do? It decided to free up \$1.4 billion so it could send \$125 or \$250 cheques to individuals or families to help

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them deal with the high cost of energy products, or so it said. One has to look at how the government did that. It decided to send a cheque to all those who receive a GST tax credit.

However, some people do not have an oil heating system, they have electric heating. Some do not necessarily use a car, they use public transit, and so on. This measure was strictly meant to help members opposite during the election campaign because I am sure people badgered them on this issue.

Members just had to say, "Look, we will mail you a cheque in January, we will help you". We are talking about a \$125 cheque for someone who has an oil heating system and who has seen his heating bills doubled. For some families, the increase can be as much as \$1,000 with a long winter that started early in December and that seems to be dragging on longer than last year. That makes for incredibly high costs. These timid measures were not aimed at the people who really needed help.

Let us go back to the bill now before the House. What is the hon. member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik suggesting to solve the problem? It is a bill that says: "Here is our solution. We are going to ask the oil companies to post the prices before tax".

I listened carefully to the hon. member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik to try to understand how his logic works. The price I am interested in is the price I have to pay. Even if the price before tax is posted, when I go fill up, I am still going to have to pay the same price if nothing is done to change the business practices in the industry and the fuel tax policy. The total price is going to be the same. Consumers want to know the price they are going to pay, not the price that will be posted. I do not see what good it would do to post a lower price.

An hon. member: Hear, hear.

Mr. Pierre Brien: I thank my colleague. I am glad to see I have so much support from the Liberals, although it is kind of strange.

What is important is the real price we have to pay, and that is a different debate in itself. Should we always post the price with tax? Consumers know full well that they are going to have to pay the GST, the PST and the excise tax. They might not always know the exact amount of tax they are going to pay, but they know the goods they are buying are taxed. The excise tax comes to 10 cents a litre and the provincial tax varies in Quebec between 10 and 15.5 cents depending on the region.

Taxes are high, but we already know that. Consumers are more interested in finding out what improvements can be made to the business practices in the oil industry. How can we improve the situation in the short, medium and long term?

In the short term, we could give consumers a break by reducing or suspending the excise tax for a while. We are being realistic and we know that oil products are under the control of countries which

are big producers and which were therefore able to reduce the oil supply so that the price of a barrel of oil is very high. This is part of the explanation for the increase. We know that and we are being realistic.

However one thing still puzzles us. Why is it that, when the price of gasoline at the pump increases, it is suddenly increasing everywhere instantly? There could be three or four different stations at an intersection, and they all suddenly show the same new price. As far as prices are concerned, there is incredible harmony among people who should be fierce competitors.

• (1805)

I studied economics. I try to understand how this is possible without some form of collusion. Of course, this is very difficult to prove. But it is something to consider. Should we not change the Competition Act to make the burden of proof less demanding in cases of anticompetitive behaviour? Oil companies should be held accountable.

There is an area where we could do something. A very interesting study was made a few years ago by Liberal members. It suggested that the average price of gas in Canada was about 4 to 5 cents higher because there is not enough competition in the industry. Why was there no follow-up on this report, why is it gathering dust on the shelves? The government is just playing for time by referring the issue to the conference board in the hope that the problem will just go away. It will not.

Every time the oil companies publish their quarterly results, we realize that record profits are piling up. Their production activities have much to do in that regard but I am convinced they do not lose much in retail marketing. Logically, the oil companies should have a hard time in retailing when prices go up, but they do not, because they control the process from refining to retail marketing.

We go even further than that by looking at what is being done in six American states. They have decided that companies will not be allowed to be refiner, distributor and retail marketer all at once. I will very candidly admit that this was first brought to my attention by a working paper prepared by Liberal members describing this situation. They wrote that in the United States, some states have a legislation called a divorce act, to keep companies from being involved both in retail marketing and in refining. We have checked, and there are six of them

This is an interesting notion which prevents too great a concentration within the industry. I believe it is a way to improve competition in the industry and we should look into it.

Also, we should not lose track of another element, namely the long term. We must invest massively in the research and development of alternative energies. The way we use gasoline today has

consequences for the environment. It is in our best interest to invest massively in the development of alternative energies.

The oil industry has no interest in doing so because it stands to profit from the current situation. Governments will therefore have to be major players in supporting and developing alternative energies.

Before I conclude, I would like to get back to the member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik. I know he goes around the regions pretending to care about gas prices. It was his choice to have this motion debated today.

There is another motion in his name, requesting that the government considerably lower its taxes on gas. He could have chosen that one because it is not his motion that was drawn, but his name. He is the one who decided which motion would be debated. He chose this one even though he had another one asking for lower taxes, which could have been votable. He cannot say whatever he likes. If he really wants lower taxes, he should say so and act accordingly and introduce real motions.

In conclusion I will say that this bill does not deal with the problem. Posting the price, before or after taxes, does not matter. What matters is the price we pay. We must look for real solutions to the real problems consumers are facing, and that is what we are doing.

We will have the opportunity to get back to this in the next few days when the Conference Board's study is made public. We will put forward our solutions once again.

[English]

Hon. Lorne Nystrom (Regina—Qu'Appelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will say a few words on the motion by the Liberal member from across the way.

I certainly agree with him that we should have more explicit pricing of energy costs and should have the taxes listed. The intent of the bill is probably quite honourable.

I will throw out a couple of other ideas that we might want to consider.

When I look at oil companies today I see them making tremendous profits, higher profits than they have made in many years. I think the time has come for the federal parliament to look at the idea of a surtax on those excessive profits and of using the surtax to reinvest in renewable energy resources. We should start looking for alternatives to the internal combustion engine, such as wind and solar energy and other renewables that are clean. I think we could do that if we had more money to invest in those technologies.

• (1810)

I want to lay before the House today a couple of statistics that show we have room to put an excess profit tax or special surtax on the price of energy.

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I have some numbers from Statistics Canada on the profitability of the energy sector: the oil, gas and coal industries. If one looks back at 1999, the after tax net profit was \$3.1 billion. In the third quarter of 2000 it more than doubled to \$7.1 billion. In other words, there is an awful lot of money, an awful lot of cash, in that industry.

The Alberta government does not seem to be putting much of a tax on the oil and gas companies in that province. A study was recently conducted by a university group in Alberta, the University of Alberta's Parkland Institute, in November of this year. It said that the Klein government had basically been giving away Alberta's oil wells.

Taxes now in Alberta are a lot lower on oil companies than they were during the days of Conservative Premier Peter Lougheed. Taxes are a lot lower in Alberta than in two other very oil rich jurisdictions in the world, Norway and Alaska.

The institute did the study before the increase in energy prices and before the huge spike in profits of the gas and oil companies. The study was done between 1992 and 1997. Between those years, if the Alberta government had taxed the oil companies as much as Peter Lougheed and the Conservatives did a number of years ago, it would have collected an extra \$3.78 billion. The Alberta government would have collected \$3.78 billion in extra money if it had had the same taxing regime, the same royalty regime, as Peter Lougheed, the Conservative premier of Alberta back in the 1970s.

If we compare a more modern regime in the world in terms of taxes to Alberta, let us use Alaska. Alaska is part of the United States. It is not exactly a socialistic country in terms of taxation regimes. Between 1992 and 1997, if taxes in Alberta had been the same as taxes in Alaska, there would have been an extra \$2 billion for the people of Alberta in terms of revenue from the oil industry.

The tax regime is even higher in Norway. If Alberta taxes had been the same as the taxes in Norway, there would have been an extra \$5.7 billion per year. I should make it clear that I am talking per year. If the same regime as the one in Alaska had been applied in Alberta it would have an extra \$2 billion per year. If the same taxation regime as Peter Lougheed's it would have an extra \$3.78 billion per year.

There is tremendous room for a tax increase on the oil industry in Canada. These numbers are from 1992 to 1997. Since then prices and profits have skyrocketed. The time has come for the federal government to act by putting a surtax on the excessive profits of oil companies and using those profits to invest in renewable resources.

Some oil companies in Alberta will scream and holler, but we have the jurisdiction as the federal parliament to impose a surtax. It has been done to banks and to other companies in the past. Let us take the leadership and do it in terms of oil companies and make sure the excess money is used for the ordinary people of Canada.

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My old friend from Souris—Moose Mountain lives in oil country. I am sure he will agree that the profits are excessive and much too high. I am sure he will agree that the great Conservative leader Peter Lougheed taxed them at a fair rate back in the seventies and that the same thing should be done today. If Ralph Klein will not do it then we will do it in the Parliament of Canada for the benefit of all Canadians, for more money in renewable resources.

• (1815)

I say that as a westerner and I know there will be some people who will say that it is none of Ottawa's business to impose an excess profit tax on the oil companies. We can do it to banks; we can do it to other companies; but we must stay off big oil. That belongs to Alberta. That oil belongs in part to all people in the country as well as the excess profit they are gouging from consumers.

They are gouging the consumers when they go to the gas pumps. Some of that excess profit should be used to invest in renewable energy. They are gouging consumers in Regina, Macoun, Estevan, Weyburn, Montreal, Vancouver and even in Bengough. In Newfoundland it is about 80 cents a litre for gasoline. Big oil is bloated with humongous profits.

Let us put a special surcharge, an excess profit surcharge on these big oil companies and make sure that money is used on behalf of Canadians. I believe that is what should be done.

I am sure that all these right wingers in the Reform Party and my friend from Souris—Moose Mountain will get up and agree with that. As a matter of fact, if we did that we could lessen the tax burden from Ottawa on ordinary citizens, have a fair taxation system and collect the money on the basis of the ability to pay. I believe that is what should be done.

If we do that, I am sure about 95% of the Canadian people would agree that we are going in the right direction. Even my good friends in the Reform Party that come from the oil patch, the alliance reform or reform alliance party, would grudgingly agree that is not a bad idea whatsoever.

The last point I would like to make is that my good friend John Solomon, a member of parliament from 1993 to 2000, used to recommend an energy review commission to review energy prices and make sure consumers are not gouged. It is an idea we should look at once again.

I say to my Liberal friends that the Liberal premier of Newfoundland was on television at 5 o'clock this afternoon talking about how the Newfoundland government will control the price of gasoline in the province of Newfoundland. It will be tied to the world price. If the world price goes up, the price in Newfoundland will go up; if the world price goes down, the price in Newfoundland will go down.

Prince Edward Island does a similar thing. It is a little different in terms of how the price is set there. It is a little more arbitrary in

Prince Edward Island, but at least it is the same principle and the same idea.

Maybe, as a federal parliament, we should be directing our government to try to co-ordinate efforts across the board, to have some regulations in terms of oil and gas prices.

These are just a couple of ideas. As I said, John Solomon often used to speak in the House of Commons about the need for an energy commission and doing what is now being done in Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island. Perhaps the federal government should lead in that direction.

In my last minute I once again recommend an excess profit tax and surtax on big oil. Let us have big oil pay its fair share. Ordinary citizens pay their fair share; in fact they pay too much in terms of taxes. How about big oil paying its fair share and using that money, the extra hundreds of billions of dollars to invest in renewable energy? Each and every one of us and the environment would be much better off. I am sure those words are supported enthusiastically by my friend from the alliance reform party from Souris—Moose Mountain.

Mr. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, PC): Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure today that I rise to speak to Bill C-220, an act respecting the posting of fuel prices by retailers.

I commend my hon. colleague for the introduction of the legislation. It will help in terms of achieving greater levels of transparency in the pricing and in terms of allowing consumers to know the price they are paying at the pumps for fuel that actually goes to the retailer and ultimately to the petroleum company.

• (1820)

That being the case, the real culprit in fuel pricing in Canada is not necessarily the producer but, as is more often the case, the federal government in terms of the gas taxes that are collected and are not returned to the provinces for investment in our highways and our infrastructure.

The excise tax on gasoline in Canada and the U.S. is quite similar, despite the fact that gas retailers and refineries in Canada operate in a less efficient market than the U.S. The federal government is clearly the real culprit in terms of the taxes levied on petroleum.

From 1998 to 1999 the federal government collected \$4.7 billion in gas taxes and only returned 4.1%, or a paltry \$194 million, in provincial transfers for highways. Thirty-six per cent to 45% of the price consumers pay at the pumps actually goes directly to federal and provincial taxes.

The 1998 Liberal caucus task force, with, I believe, 47 Liberal backbenchers, recommended reducing the federal excise tax on gasoline from 10 cents to 8.5 cents. After studying the issue their request was turned down by the Minister of Finance. Ironically,

Private Members' Business

what the Liberal caucus task force was looking for was the elimination of the 1995 deficit reduction surtax that was introduced by the Minister of Finance at that time to ostensibly reduce the deficit.

The deficit is gone. Why is the gas tax, that unnecessary 1.5 cents per litre gas tax, still there? It was introduced to get rid of the deficit. The deficit has gone. The tax is still there despite the fact that 47 Liberal backbenchers recommended its elimination. It is one of the times that I actually agree with my colleagues opposite that the gas tax should be gone.

We have called for a national highways infrastructure program. There are great disparities between the provinces in terms of their ability to afford to upgrade their highways as opposed to some of the other provinces.

In Nova Scotia we are facing significant financial constraints and infrastructure deficits at this time. Highway 101 in my riding is a death trap. There have been over 50 deaths in recent years on that highway. It has the highest level of traffic in the province and is one of the most dangerous highways in the country. We are looking for, and the federal government has said there will be, a federal-provincial cost sharing or twinning on that program.

The difficulty is that the province is not in the fiscal position to participate on a 50:50 basis from day one. We are looking for a front end loading program where the federal government would in fact pay the lion's share of the cost upfront but, over a five year period, the province would pick up a greater part of the contribution. This would make a lot more sense, particularly given the fact that this is a life and death issue and should be viewed as such.

This type of initiative would, in a reasonable way, facilitate the commencement of that project in the short term. It would save lives and lead to greater levels of economic development in that fast growing area of the province, the Annapolis Valley. It makes a great deal of sense.

I will comment now on a different area of the petroleum issue. The premier of Nova Scotia has been campaigning vigorously on this issue, on behalf of all Nova Scotians, regardless of partisan politics. I direct my comments to the member for Halifax West, who I am sure at this point supports the premier's initiative.

The campaign for fairness, which Premier John Hamm has initiated, is a very important debate in which we need to be engaged. The federal government is currently taking the lion's share of offshore petroleum revenues from Nova Scotia. We are not receiving the benefits. Nova Scotia needs those revenues in order to bootstrap itself into the 21st century and afford the education and transportation infrastructures needed to compete in a hypercompetitive global economy. At the same time, it needs those revenues to reduce its fiscal burdens, particularly its tax burdens, which inhibit growth and prosperity in this very difficult time.

• (1825)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy St-Julien: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank all the members who spoke tonight, be they members of the Canadian Alliance, the Progressive Conservative Party, the Bloc Québécois or the New Democratic Party. Most of them submitted good ideas.

I would like to make a remark before my last comment. The hon. member for Témiscamingue is trying to mislead the House of Commons and the consumers of Abitibi—Témiscamingue by saying: “The hon. member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik goes around in his riding boasting of what he says in parliament, but in the meantime, he tabled a motion saying the opposite”.

We will put some clarity in the rules of the House of Commons. According to last week's draw, I got to present a bill, not a motion. When I received a call from the private members' business office, I was in Abitibi, in the beautiful city of Val-d'Or, 400 kilometres away from Ottawa. That call informed my office that I had won the draw and that my bill was chosen, not a motion.

I do have many motions dealing with the demands made by the people of the large riding of Abitibi, which covers 802 000 square kilometres and has a population of 100 000, including 68 mayors as well as Inuit and Cree chiefs.

The hon. member for Témiscamingue is trying to mislead the House by saying that it was a motion and that I could choose. That is not true. He lied.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): I cannot accept that comment, absolutely not. I ask the member to withdraw his words.

Mr. Guy St-Julien: Mr. Speaker, I withdraw what I said, namely that he lied.

Mr. Pierre Brien: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I will admit that the member did table a motion dating back to Monday only, so he could not have won the draw for that motion. In fact, it would have been impossible for him to table the motion I was talking about.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): The member's comment is really a point of debate. I cannot accept it as a point of order.

Adjournment Debate

Mr. Guy St-Julien: Mr. Speaker, in any event, we will move to another topic because that one is headed nowhere.

There are 14,000 outlets in Canada. Perhaps half of them are private service stations. They do what they want, depending on the price of gas.

Regardless of the report that will be tabled tomorrow and the comments in it, which matters to the public and to the consumer, is that the oil industry, with the millions, the billions it is making, should stand up. It should bear in mind the public's level of frustration and adopt more transparent pricing practices, including showing the gross price and giving the breakdown for refinery, processing, whole sale and retail prices and taxes.

I think that everyone's interests would be better served if the industry made a greater effort to explain how prices are set and made this information available to consumers. That is what is important.

There has been some good discussion this evening touching on the American, BQ, NDP and PC points of view. What is important is that the oil companies are going to have to stand up and tell consumers what it costs. They are hiding behind the taxes. It is true that the taxes should be reduced.

I would like both levels of government, federal and provincial, to reduce the taxes. We are all in agreement with that. What is important is that the oil companies stand up. They are making billions of dollars in profits on the backs of consumers. It is time they came clean.

I could say some unpleasant things, but I will not. I enjoyed this evening's debate. We all had a very interesting time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): It being 6.30 p.m., the time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now passed. The motion not being designated as a votable item, the order is dropped from the order paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

• (1830)

[*English*]

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

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon—Souris, PC): Mr. Speaker, I rise this evening to speak on the late show. I had the opportunity of posing a question for the Prime Minister a couple of weeks ago with respect to the Prime Minister's visit to the United States and his discussions with the President Bush.

The Prime Minister was to talk about the unfair subsidization of agricultural products that the United States has been so famous for. The Prime Minister in his answer was very forthcoming. He said that he was going to discuss that particular issue with the president and that he would try to convince him to remove those subsidies wherever possible so that we could compete on a fair and level playing field.

As part of my question, I also suggested that if he did not receive the answer from the president that he was looking for, that there would not be any more subsidies, would he then increase the support payments to Canadian farmers so that they can compete. That part of the question was never answered and was left hanging, a moot answer from the Prime Minister.

I would like to have an answer because it is extremely important. For example, right now the United States is putting \$48.2 billion back into its agriculture and its producers. Canada right now, and it has increased, is supporting its agricultural producers by \$3.1 billion. There is a terrible discrepancy with the amount of unfair subsidization, not only in the United States but in Europe.

This is my question for the parliamentary secretary tonight. Since the Prime Minister did not get any of those assurances from the president, since there are still unfair subsidies being put forward by the United States and the European Union, since our producers are still not able to compete on a level playing field, why will the Prime Minister of the country not support agriculture? As a matter of fact, it is getting to the point that the Americans are putting more and more dollars into its producers.

Just recently, the parliamentary secretary and I had an opportunity to meet the house agricultural committee chairman, Larry Combest, while we were in Washington. Mr. Combest said:

America's farmers and ranchers will be looking to us to not only assist them in coping with the challenges that they are facing, but also to make some meaningful improvements to the farm safety net in order to bring some stability to their livelihoods. I think that the report we are reviewing today presents us with good opportunity to begin an earnest effort in this Committee to build consensus on how best to address all the challenges facing agriculture today, and to craft better farm policy for the future.

I wish we had that individual here on that side of the House so that those same views could be shared with our producers and our agricultural farmers of the country.

I want the parliamentary secretary to be able to stand today and tell us that in fact we are going to compete with the Americans on a subsidy basis. The Prime Minister got the wrong answers when he was down there. I would like to hear the right answers from the parliamentary secretary.

Adjournment Debate

Mr. Larry McCormick (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians can be proud of the fact that we have one of the best food safety systems in the world. However, that does not mean that we can be complacent. Recently food inspection systems around the world have had to respond to a troubling development, the growing threat of BSE, bovine spongiform encephalopathy, also known as mad cow disease.

Canada has taken several measures to prevent the spread or the induction of the disease. So far, those measures have been successful but there is no such thing as zero risk. That is why Canada asked its trading partners to provide information that would help to assess their BSE status. They responded, except for Brazil.

In addition, the Food and Agriculture Organization, the FAO, report indicated there is significant potential that BSE may have already moved beyond Europe. Further information came to light that Brazil may have imported cattle from the European Union countries that are not free of BSE.

• (1835)

As a result, Canada suspended imports of beef products from that country. We took an extra step. We went the extra mile to help resolve this issue. With our NAFTA partners, the U.S. and Mexico, we sent a team of officials to Brazil to fully assess the Brazilian regulatory system for the risk of BSE.

The team has gathered considerable data. Building on this information, our animal health authorities are taking all the steps required to complete their assessment expeditiously.

Just as Canada's objective in the decision to suspend imports from Brazil was entirely related to maintaining the safety of our food supply and the health of Canadians, our final decision will be based solely upon achieving these objectives. Canadians expect no less.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2.00 p.m., pursuant to order made Tuesday, February 13, 2001.

(The House adjourned at 6.36 p.m.)

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